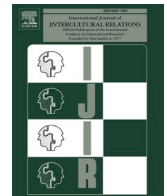




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Majority acculturation through globalization: The importance of life skills in navigating the cultural pluralism of globalization

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary globalized societies, traditional sociocultural structure and guidance have been increasingly disrupted, challenging people's self-understanding, global perspective, and well-being. These transformations have enhanced the need for competency in navigating diverse meaning systems and cultural pluralism. The development of generic life skills provides relevant abilities to deal effectively with everyday demands and challenges in multicultural complexity. As cultural globalization comprises both similarities and differences across various locations, it is valuable to disentangle what relates to universal processes and what concerns culture-specific consequences through cross-cultural research. In the present study, we examined the association between life skills and endorsement of peaceful dialogue, meaning in life, and perceived stress through dissimilar reactions to globalization (multicultural acquisition and ethnic protection) across the highly dissimilar contexts of the United States ($n = 312$) and Pakistan ($n = 285$). The results indicate that life skills were significantly associated with peaceful dialogue and meaning in life in both contexts, but the negative relationship with perceived stress only reached significance in the U.S. sample. Life skills were positively associated with peaceful dialogue and perceived stress through multicultural acquisition in the U.S. sample, and life skills were positively associated with meaning in life through ethnic protection in the Pakistani sample. The results are discussed vis-à-vis similarities and differences, suggesting life skills are relevant capabilities for addressing globalized challenges in everyday life.

Scholars have argued that globalization has increasingly complicated everyday life across the world (Bauman, 1998; Jensen et al., 2011). Globalization describes the accelerating interconnectivity across terrestrial borders, resulting in a multidirectional flow of people, goods, and ideas (Tomlinson, 1999). Accordingly, technological development has facilitated the exchange of information across geographical distances as well as mobility across national borders. Globalized interconnectivity includes acculturation processes that affect majority populations as they adapt to intercultural contact; that is, through globalization, individuals with different cultural backgrounds come into contact either directly or indirectly through media, resulting in changes in the original cultural patterns. This is also referred to as globalization-based acculturation (Berry, 2008; Chen et al., 2008). Consequently, local contexts have become increasingly diversified with cultural influences from media and migration. These globalization processes have disrupted the traditional socioculturally derived sense of stability, order, and meaning and accentuated the individual's choices in increasingly liberal contexts (Jensen et al., 2011). Such broadening of life possibilities and developmental paths has been embraced in some contexts by

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people who manage and succeed in navigating intercultural complexity. By contrast, other people have experienced psychological distress because of the lack of sociocultural guidelines. With the proliferation of cultural ways of handling everyday life tasks (e.g., social interaction and group participation, as well as pursuing education or working through setting goals), the individual navigates through the management of these tasks without guidance from the traditional cultural way of life. Accordingly, life skills used in handling generic everyday life tasks have become pivotal for navigating the globalized complexity of contemporary society (Ozer & Bertelsen, 2020).

Although globalization reflects a universal process of interconnectivity, there are significant variations in how these processes are approached and played out across local contexts (Berry, 2008). Young people in American or European contexts might experience distress regarding the bewildering multitude of culturally shaped life trajectories that are available, as well as a lack of sociocultural guidance in life; by contrast, young people in Asian or African countries might experience distress regarding the traditional cultural restrictions with the awareness of dissimilar ways of life or experience a threat of cultural erosion due to the influx of Western culture (Chiu et al., 2011; Ozer et al., 2017). Either way, these different consequences of globalization highlight the importance of general competencies and skills that help handle common life tasks and challenges with circumscribed sociocultural guidelines.

Seminal work has been conducted on the sociological consequences of globalization (e.g., Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1999). However, a research gap exists and invites empirical work on the psychological effects of globalized sociocultural diversity (Chiu et al., 2011). Based on cultural globalization as an emerging field of research, we examined the role of generic life skills regarding various psychological outcomes through reactions to globalization-based acculturation. We examine these associations in the highly dissimilar contexts of Pakistan and the United States to reach beyond the limitations of WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) perspectives (Henrich et al., 2010) and to understand the similarities and differences associated with the local consequences of cultural globalization. Our study emphasizes the development of life skills among young people as a way to reach a salutary direction in life and intercultural harmony and to prepare them for the psychosocial challenges of globalization. Accordingly, we examine how life skills are associated with the endorsement of peaceful dialogue, meaning in life, and perceived stress through global orientations (i.e., multicultural acquisition and ethnic protection) across the contexts of the United States and Pakistan.

The conception of generic life skills for handling everyday life tasks

There are various approaches to the concept of life skills (Yankey & Biswas, 2012). WHO (2020) defined life skills as “[a]bilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (p. 17). That is, revolving around the conception of agency and human connectivity (Bertelsen, 2021), life skills can be modeled and developed throughout life to provide the abilities needed to live a healthy and satisfactory life (WHO, 2020). Accordingly, interventions to develop life skills have proven to mitigate stress and improve self-esteem (Sobhi-Gharamaleki & Rajabi, 2010; Yankey & Biswas, 2012), improve how challenges in life are handled, and aid in reaching goals (Bertelsen et al., 2020). Such improvements in mental health and self-development could relate to the establishment of perceived meaning in life. Young people in particular are presented with the life task of forming an identity by reflecting upon what is important in life, thereby identifying a sense of purpose and direction (Erikson, 1968) as well as a cultural affiliation. With the globalized challenges in life, life skills might facilitate an experience of meaning in life through goal directedness or purposefulness, highlighting the importance of everyday decision making (Steger et al., 2006).

Bertelsen (2021, 2022) developed a taxonomical model of life skills and suggested ten central life skills across three categories. The first category of *participation* includes the following: (1) the relational skill concerning close social relationships; (2) the framework skill regarding basic material framework and activities; (3) the community skill about making a difference when it comes to the greater good. In the category of *attunement*, the included life skills are the following: (4) the attentiveness skill about being present and being focused, as well as absorbed and engaged; (5) the planning skill about creating an overview of what needs to be done to finding the most efficient way to reach that goal; (6) the norm-value skill about assessing whether what one is doing or what one is part of aligns with his or her personal norms and values. *Perspective taking* as the third category includes the following life skills: (7) the awareness skill concerning the use of one’s senses in relation to the perceptions coming from the surrounding world and bodily sensations or affects; (8) the contemplation skill about taking into perspective one’s own thoughts, feelings, and motivation in a given situation; (9) the empathy skill about taking into perspective other people’s thoughts, feelings, and motivation in a given situation, and (10) the system skill about seeing the world and life from a system perspective (laws, regulations, institutions, and procedures, as well as scientific and cultural discourses; Bertelsen, 2021). Such life skills have been empirically linked with general self-efficacy, self-determination, and satisfaction with life in a sample of American college students (Ozer & Bertelsen, 2020).

The generic conception of life skills situated at the interface of agency and structure (Bertelsen, 2022) is founded in an assumption about general life tasks being present in all societies although the specificity of such tasks may culturally vary in important ways (e.g., relationships with others can appear differently among tribes in a Pakistani region compared with a large American city such as New York, yet they reflect a fundamental human need for belonging). Accordingly, although the conception of life skills is founded in the understanding of agency and autonomy (Chirkov et al., 2010), such life skills can be directed toward collectivist goals of maintaining relationships, developing empathy, and understanding the shared meaning system as well as toward individualist goals of decision making, individual motivation, and goal setting. Overall, life skills are conceptualized as participation and positions taken by the individual as well as positions and understandings assigned by the surrounding world that reflect the mutual dynamics of agency and structure in human development (Bertelsen, 2021). Notably, the cultural values of collectivism and individualism are not mutually exclusive, and in contemporary globalized societies, people may draw upon both collectivist and individualist values and practices depending on the context and intercultural exposure. However, because the concept of life skills originated from the Western history of

ideas, caution should be applied when interpreting results across primarily individualist or collectivist contexts.

Life skills and the globalized complexification of common life tasks

Through the transformative power of globalization, Western societies in particular have become more individualistic. Although globalization as increased connectivity does not necessarily promote individualism, individualism has often been an outcome that reflects how the flow of cultural elements from Western contexts toward non-Western contexts is more influential than the other way around. Furthermore, this increase in individualism is not necessarily the outcome of globalization, as a counter reaction could strengthen the communal orientation and collectivistic values. Nonetheless, globalization has generally caused a greater complexity in society because of how it has challenged traditional ways of doing things. To handle psychosocial challenges, people employ life skills to manage both everyday tasks and life projects (Bertelsen, 2021). McAdams (2009) highlighted the importance of life projects in fostering well-being as well as a sense of home and meaning in the world. Indeed, life skills constitute essential abilities for achieving a satisfactory and meaningful life by making it possible to cope adequately with various life challenges, including those associated with adapting to cultural globalization (Ozer & Bertelsen, 2020).

Reaching a sense of meaning in life requires the ability to form coherent worldviews and to explain why events occur, as well as the ability to identify goals to pursue (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016). Moreover, adequately handling everyday life tasks could enhance one's self-conception by developing an understanding of oneself and the world one lives in; this could in turn foster a peaceful attitude and harmonious coexistence in the global interconnectivity through the endorsement of dialogue between nations (Broccoli et al., 2021). Although the concept of life skills is directed toward everyday life tasks (Bertelsen, 2022), the concept has been proven relevant in regard to managing everyday life during increasingly shaped by intercultural connectivity. In particular, the perspective-taking aspect of life skills might be associated with intercultural abilities including metacognitive reflection and a sensitivity to the contextual meaning system (Leung et al., 2014). With increasing interconnectivity, contemporary prospective life projects must be realized in, and based on, the complexity and liquidity of multicultural and global societal perspectives about life (Bauman, 2000; Bertelsen, 2021). Accordingly, how individuals react to cultural globalization and generic life skills may prove to be important when navigating and adapting to the accelerating complexity of globalized societies.

Adaptive and maladaptive reactions to cultural globalization

Currently, plural societies across the world are debating the issue of cultural homogeneity versus diversity (Berry, 2017). Through cultural globalization, majority group members are being exposed to direct and indirect acculturation without relocating to a different country (Ozer et al., 2021). Such majority acculturation has been approached differently with the theory of remote acculturation examining the specific cultural orientation of majority group members exposed to indirect/intermittent cultural contact across geographical distances (e.g., Jamaicans gravitating toward Jamaican, African American, and European American culture; Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). Additionally, proximal acculturation has been examined as majority members' national culture maintenance and immigrant culture adaptation (Lefringhausen & Marshall, 2016). Within globalization-based acculturation, individual differences in the psychological processes of acculturating to the globalizing world have been studied through *multicultural acquisition* and *ethnic protection* (Chen et al., 2016).

On the individual level, reactions to intercultural connectivity have been conceptualized as integrative or exclusionary (Chiu et al., 2011). These reactions reflect positive (e.g., learning possibilities) and negative (e.g., threat) perceptions of intercultural contact. That is, although globalization poses both positive and negative forces that impact everyday life to various degrees in contemporary societies, these influences must be handled skillfully. For example, understanding different value systems from other sociocultural contexts and taking into perspective other people's thoughts, feelings, and motivations when those people originate from a foreign culture require some basic life skills for reaching a positive and harmonious outcome.

Chen et al. (2016) operationalized integrative and exclusionary responses to globalization designated as *multicultural acquisition* and *ethnic protection*. Reflecting individual differences in reacting to globalized intercultural contact, ethnic protection describes exclusionary, reflexive, and spontaneous reactions; multicultural acquisition describes integrative, deliberate, and effortful reactions. Proactive multicultural acquisition defines obtaining cultural knowledge, learning the customs and traditions of foreign cultures, and appreciating cultural diversity. As such, these reactions to intercultural contact tap into the immigration-based acculturation strategies of integration (i.e., adoption of other cultures and heritage cultural maintenance) and separation (heritage cultural maintenance without adopting other cultural elements; Berry, 1997), as well as multicultural adaptation and national culture maintenance among majority members in proximal acculturation (Lefringhausen & Marshall, 2016); notably, however, separation and national culture maintenance is not necessarily defensive as conceptualized in ethnic protection. Defensive ethnic protection designates a practice of sticking to one's cultural norms and practices regardless of the context, maintaining essentialist and ethnocentric views of other cultural groups, and feeling uneasy during intercultural contact. Accordingly, life skills that include abilities in forming relationships and understanding a systematic perspective on diverse worldviews would be expected to relate positively to multicultural acquisition and negatively to ethnic protection as a defensive reaction to cultural globalization. Furthermore, multicultural acquisition has been positively associated with well-being and openness to cultural diversity, and ethnic protection has been negatively associated with these outcomes among samples from Hong Kong (Chen et al., 2016).

Adapting to globalized life tasks

Although causality is still an open question in acculturation research, a weak to strong positive association between multiple cultural integration and well-being outcomes has been discussed and indicates a need for caution in assuming causality (Kunst, 2021). Accordingly, intercultural adaptation should not be conceptualized as homogeneously stressful for everyone across dissimilar acculturation dynamics (e.g., remote acculturation and proximal acculturation). Overall, everyday life tasks have become more complex because of globalization processes. For example, friendships and collaboration often include cultural differences and interactions with meaning systems dissimilar from one's own that need to be understood. Adapting to such complex life conditions could influence one's orientation toward intercultural relations and well-being. Accordingly, reactions to intercultural connectivity could play a role in how successfully one's life skills are utilized (Ozer & Bertelsen, 2020).

Globalization-based acculturation may facilitate intercultural communication and interaction, which can lead to greater understanding and tolerance or perceived threats to one's cultural identity (Chiu et al., 2011). Consequently, multicultural acquisition could be associated with a more positive, and ethnic protection with a less positive, attitude toward peaceful dialogue (Broccoli et al., 2021), as people become more aware of the importance of prosperous intercultural relations and harmony (Berry, 2017). Additionally, globalization can challenge one's sociocultural embeddedness and prompt a sense of disconnection from one's cultural roots and local community, promoting individual pursuits and less communal affiliation that can distance people from important sources of meaning in life (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1999). Integrating various cultural streams could relate to the dialectical process of searching for and reaching a sense of meaning in life, whereas a defense of one's ethnic integrity could relate to a distressful as well as reflexive rather than a meaning-driven search for cohesion and direction in life (Steger et al., 2008). Moreover, the disruption of traditional cultural embeddedness and the complexification of life tasks can reflect a way that globalization might cause an experience of stress; however, the success of proactively integrating a multicultural orientation rather than a defensive reaction could be linked with less perceived stress as a way to employ metacognitive reflection when engaging in the present intercultural contact (Chen et al., 2016).

Globalization in the United States and Pakistan

Although globalization is influential in most countries, some nations are more affected by intercultural connectivity. For example, Facebook usage has been noted as one channel through which cultural information is spread across geographical distances (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). In December 2020, 70.95 % of the U.S. population was using Facebook. By comparison, there were 20.86 % Facebook users in Pakistan in June 2021 (World Population Review, 2022). The KOF Globalization Index rates countries between 0 and 100 in regard to cultural globalization, measured through trade in cultural goods, the number of McDonald's restaurants and IKEA stores, and trade in personal, cultural, and recreational services (Gygli et al., 2019). By this measure, the United States scored 93.52 and Pakistan 29.79, indicating that the United States is much more globalized compared to the Pakistani context. The changes in globalization across the last 10 years reveal that the U.S. KOF index score has increased from 87.48, but the Pakistani score decreased from 33.22 since 2012. However, these scores and developments could reflect a misconception of globalization as westernization (Gygli et al., 2019) and suggest that cultural globalization consists of a one-way flux of cultural goods (e.g., McDonald's restaurants and IKEA stores originating in the West) rather than a multidirectional process of cultural interconnectivity (including the spread of mindfulness and Japanese Kawaii culture in the United States). This could also reflect a preference for the local culture over the global culture as a desire to keep the global culture at bay by prohibiting the absorption of the traditional indigenous culture into the global culture (Jensen & Arnett, 2012).

The current study

In the present study, we examined life skills (participation, attunement, and perspective taking) in relation to an endorsement of peaceful dialogue, perceived stress, and finding meaning in life through global orientations across the highly dissimilar contexts of Pakistan and the United States. These contexts were chosen because they represent what is generally perceived as a Western/individualistic/unconventional versus non-Western/collectivistic/traditional contexts (Hofstede, 2001). Through our exploratory cross-country comparison, we expect the same overall hypotheses in both contexts. However, with the United States reflecting an individualistic and highly globalized context, we assume that our predictions regarding the challenge of navigating a disrupted traditional culture and broad cultural exposure would apply to the U.S. context to a greater degree than the Pakistani context.

People who develop cultural competence and life skills can navigate and participate in global culture through proactive adaptation to multiple cultural resources by engaging with others, setting goals, and understanding the sociocultural structure in which one is embedded. Such adaptive navigation would lead to greater well-being (i.e., less perceived stress, greater meaning in life, and endorsement of peaceful dialogue). A defensive response to globalization may reflect poor adaptation and well-being (e.g., greater levels of stress, less meaning in life, and less endorsement of peaceful dialogue) due to a lack of competencies or needed skills for intercultural interaction (Chen et al., 2016). Accordingly, and based on the literature review, we hypothesize the following:

Life skills are in both samples positively associated with an endorsement of peaceful dialogue, greater meaning in life, and less perceived stress (H1), and these associations are positively mediated by multicultural acquisition (H2) and negatively mediated by ethnic protection (H3).

Method

The study was preregistered at <https://aspredicted.org/7x6xu.pdf>, and the hypotheses were tested through mediation analysis (Fig. 1). In addition to the preregistered outcome variables (meaning in life and perceived stress), we included peaceful dialogue as a measure of international attitudes that would be affected by how globalization is addressed, complementing the other two intrapsychic measures affected by global interconnectivity. Data was collected through an online questionnaire in English. In the United States, data were collected through Prolific, and in Pakistan, data was collected through the distribution of a questionnaire link at Ghazi University, Punjab, Pakistan.

Participants

A total of 597 students participated in the study. We sampled students because young people in urban settings are more associated with globalized mechanisms (e.g., use of technology), suggesting that young students may be more open and sensitive to globalized intercultural exposure (Arnett, 2002). In the total sample, the age mean was 23.96 years ($SD = 3.57$), and 59.8 % reported being male, 39.5 % female, 0.5 % other, and 0.2 % did not wish to answer the question. Regarding SES, 13.1 % reported their parents' income as below the national average, 10.9 % just below average, 58.7 % average, 12.9 % just above average, and 4.4 % above average.

Participants were divided by 312 (Age $M = 25.98$; $SD = 3.04$) American students and 285 Pakistani students (Age $M = 21.72$; $SD = 2.67$). In the American group, 58.0 % reported being male, 41.3 % female, 0.3 % other, and 0.3 % did not wish to report their gender. Furthermore, 59.9 % reported being Christian, 24.7 % atheist, and 15.4 % other. Regarding SES, 8.7 % reported their parents' income as below the national average, 13.1 % just below average, 51.0 % average, 20.5 % just above average, and 6.7 % above average. Likewise, in the Pakistani group, 61.8 % reported being male, 37.5 % female, and 0.7 % other, and everyone in the Pakistani group reported being Muslim. Although not measured in the survey, a majority of inhabitants in the Dera Ghazi Kahn district refer to themselves by their tribal belonging (Baloch), reflecting a local cultural orientation that has been retained during the course of globalization (Kamran et al., 2023). Regarding SES, 18.0 % reported their parents' income as below the national average, 8.5 % just below average, 67.1 % average, 4.6 % just above average, and 1.8 % above average.

Measurement

The online questionnaire included questions regarding gender, age, and SES in addition to the following scales (see Table 1 for Cronbach's alpha and Supplementary Material for CFA and invariance testing <https://osf.io/3kbev>):

Life Skills Scale Short (LSS-S; Ozer & Bertelsen, 2020) consists of 20 items pertaining to insufficiently developed life skills divided across the three dimensions of participation, attunement, and perspective taking. Each of the conceptualized ten life skills was represented with two items. A sample item for the attunement dimension reads: "It is typical for you that you master the following: being attentive in the present situation." Responses were scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 7 (*Very often*).

The *Global Orientations Scale* (Chen et al., 2016) was included to assess individual differences in the psychological process of acculturating to cultural globalization. The original measure consists of two subscales: multicultural acquisition (13 items; "I am curious about traditions of other cultures") as a proactive response to globalization and ethnic protection (12 items; "My own culture is much superior to other cultures") as a defensive response to globalization. Based on CFA, two items on the multicultural acquisition subscale referring to foreign language abilities were removed from the analysis as they yielded poor factor loadings (<0.40 ; see Supplementary Material <https://osf.io/3kbev>). All items were answered using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

Endorsement of peaceful dialogue was measured through three items based on the sociopolitical domain of the *Peace Attitude Scale* concerning societal dialogue and harmony (Broccoli et al., 2021). Sample items include: "I think nations need to have more dialogue with each other." Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

The *Meaning in Life Questionnaire* (Steger et al., 2006) is a ten-item scale consisting of two subscales that tap into (1) the presence of meaning and (2) the search for meaning. In the present study, four items referring to the presence of meaning were included. A sample

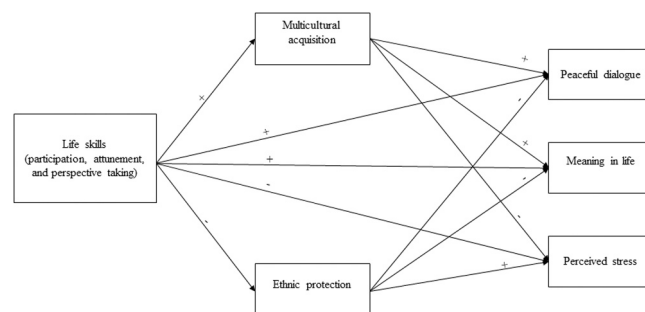


Fig. 1. The hypothesized indirect effects model.

Table 1
Correlation matrix and means.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	α_{US}	$\alpha_{Pakistan}$	$M_{US} (SD)$	$M_{Pakistan} (SD)$
1. Life skills		0.88**	0.90**	0.91**	0.40**	-0.02	0.35**	0.56**	-0.32**	0.95	0.97	5.49 (0.92)	4.15 (1.47)
2. Participation	0.88**		0.70**	0.65**	0.37**	0.05	0.28**	0.58**	-0.28**	0.89	0.85	5.19 (1.17)	3.92 (1.54)
3. Attunement	0.93**	0.75**		0.76**	0.33**	-0.06	0.33**	0.51**	-0.34**	0.89	0.96	5.72 (0.98)	4.26 (1.66)
4. Perspective taking	0.93**	0.69**	0.81**		0.37**	-0.03	0.33**	0.41**	-0.25**	0.92	0.98	5.53 (0.96)	4.27 (1.58)
5. Multicultural acquisition	0.62**	0.55**	0.57**	0.62**		-0.29**	0.59**	0.20**	-0.01	0.91	0.90	5.33 (1.18)	4.39 (1.39)
6. Ethnic Protection	0.50**	0.39**	0.46**	0.53**	0.62**		-0.27**	0.10	0.25**	0.89	0.89	3.29 (1.30)	4.17 (1.23)
7. Peaceful dialogue	0.44**	0.44**	0.36**	0.43**	0.49**	0.40**		0.08	0.01	0.83	0.98	5.96 (1.13)	4.43 (1.71)
8. Meaning in life	0.42**	0.42**	0.34**	0.42**	0.37**	0.39**	0.49**		-0.31**	0.96	0.97	4.88 (1.65)	4.57 (1.70)
9. Perceived stress	0.11	0.16**	0.07	0.06	0.23**	0.23**	0.19**	0.20**		$r = 0.69$	$r = 0.97$	2.49 (1.18)	2.91 (0.87)

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Results above the diagonal reflects US and below Pakistan.

item reads: “I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.” All items were answered using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

The short version of the *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS-4; Cohen et al., 1983) was included to measure one’s perceived level of stress by tapping into the experience of unpredictability, uncontrollability, and overload in one’s life experienced during the last month. The scale consists of four items, however, we included only the two items that were not reversed. A sample item reads: “In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?” Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Very often*).

Analytic approach

The association between life skills and the dependent variables (i.e., endorsement of peaceful dialogue, meaning in life, and stress; Hypothesis 1), as well as the mediating role of global orientations (i.e., multicultural acquisition and ethnic protection; Hypotheses 2 and 3), were examined through mediation analyses via the MODEL INDIRECT command in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2011) using Maximum Likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. In these multi-group path analyses, we included manifest variables (see Supplementary Materials for CFAs <https://osf.io/3kbev>). As a post hoc test, the three dimensions of life skills (participation, attunement, and perspective taking) were examined independently in relation to the dependent variables through global orientations. The following criteria were employed for evaluating model fit: χ^2/df ratio should be less than 3, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ≥ 0.90 , Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08 , and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) ≤ 0.08 for acceptable fit (Kline, 2015). For comparison of the results across national samples, Little’s (2013) criteria for invariance were employed: $\Delta\chi^2$ should not be significant, $\Delta RMSEA \leq .010$, and SRMR $\leq .010$.

Results

The correlation matrix and means can be found in Table 1. As some measures yielded only partial or no scalar invariance (see Supplementary Materials <https://osf.io/3kbev>), we refrained from comparing means across contexts.

Multi-group path analysis

The hypothesized indirect effects model (Fig. 1) was then estimated through multi-group path analysis. Within this estimation, gender, age, and SES were controlled for vis-à-vis their effects on the mediating and outcome variables. These covariates were included to control for their effects on differences in observed means across contexts.

The model was first examined using an aggregate score for life skills. The results of this fully saturated indirect effects model (Fig. 2 and Table 2) indicated that in the U.S. sample, there was a direct and positive association between life skills and peaceful dialogue ($\beta = 0.13, p = .023, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } .25$), as well as meaning in life ($\beta = 0.59, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.49 \text{ to } .68$); the results indicated a negative relationship with perceived stress ($\beta = -0.42, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.52 \text{ to } -0.31$). Life skills were also positively associated with multicultural acquisition ($\beta = 0.39, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.24 \text{ to } .50$) but not ethnic protection ($\beta = -0.00, p = .962, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.11 \text{ to } .11$). Moreover, multicultural acquisition was positively associated with peaceful dialogue ($\beta = 0.50, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.39 \text{ to } .62$) and perceived stress ($\beta = 0.23, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.11 \text{ to } .35$), and ethnic protection was negatively linked with peaceful dialogue ($\beta = -0.11, p = .009, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.19 \text{ to } -0.03$) and positively associated with perceived stress ($\beta = 0.30, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.18 \text{ to } .42$).

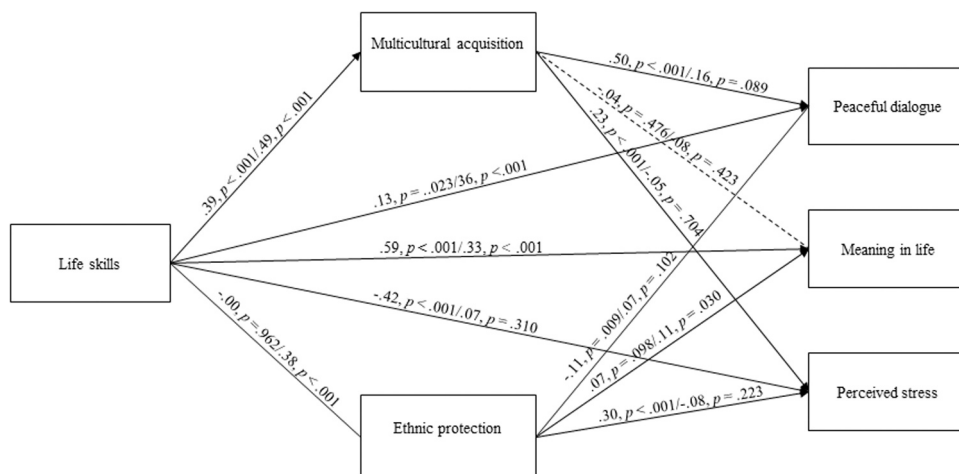


Fig. 2. Results for the indirect effects model. Note. Standardized coefficients are displayed. US/Pakistan. Within this model, multicultural acquisition and ethnic protection were allowed to covary, $r = -0.34, p < .001$ in the US sample and $r = -0.09, p = .474$ in the Pakistani sample.

Table 2
Path estimates and confidence intervals for the indirect effects model.

	Multicultural acquisition		Ethnic protection		Peaceful dialogue		Meaning in life		Perceived stress	
	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)
<i>Direct effects:</i>										
Age	0.07 (-0.02;0.17)	0.07 (-0.01;0.16)	0.14*(0.03; 25)	-0.11** (-0.20; -0.03)	-0.06 (-0.16;0.04)	0.12*(0.01;0.24)	0.08 (-0.02;0.17)	-0.05 (-0.17;0.08)	0.07 (-0.03;0.17)	-0.02 (-0.11;0.06)
Gender	0.13*(0.03;0.24)	0.08 (-0.03;0.18)	-0.11 (-0.22;0.01)	-0.01 (-0.13;0.11)	0.01 (-0.08;0.10)	0.06 (-0.05;0.17)	-0.05 (-0.15;0.04)	0.18** (0.07;0.29)	-0.02 (-0.14;0.09)	0.02 (-0.13;0.16)
SES	0.03 (-0.07;0.13)	0.07 (-0.01;0.15)	0.02 (-0.10;0.13)	0.03 (-0.05;0.11)	-0.07 (-0.17;0.02)	-0.01 (-0.12;0.10)	0.01 (-0.10;0.10)	0.03 (-0.08;0.14)	-0.04 (-0.15;0.07)	-0.02 (-0.13;0.09)
Life skills	0.39** (0.24;0.50)	0.49** (0.29;0.68)	-0.00 (-0.11;0.11)	0.38** (0.29;0.47)	0.13* (0.02;0.25)	0.36** (0.19;0.52)	0.59** (0.49;0.68)	0.33** (0.18;0.48)	-0.42** (-0.52; -0.31)	0.07 (-0.07;0.22)
Multicultural acquisition					0.50** (0.39;0.62)	0.16 (-0.01;0.35)	-0.04 (-0.15;0.07)	0.08 (-0.11;0.26)	0.23** (0.11;0.35)	-0.05 (-0.31;0.21)
Ethnic protection					-0.11* (-0.19; -0.03)	0.07 (-0.01;0.15)	0.07 (-0.01;0.16)	0.11* (0.01;0.20)	0.30** (0.18;0.42)	-0.08 (-0.20;0.05)
<i>Total and specific indirect effects:</i>										
Life skills					0.20** (0.13;0.27)	0.11 (-0.02;0.23)	-0.02 (-0.06;0.03)	0.08 (-0.03;0.19)	0.09** (0.03;0.15)	-0.05 (-0.20;0.09)
Through multicultural acquisition					0.20** (0.13;0.26)	0.08 (-0.04;0.20)	-0.02 (-0.06;0.03)	0.04 (-0.07;0.14)	0.09** (0.04;0.14)	-0.03 (-0.15;0.10)
Through ethnic protection					0.00 (-0.01;0.01)	0.03 (-0.01;0.06)	0.00 (-0.01;0.01)	0.04* (0.00;0.08)	-0.00 (-0.04;0.03)	-0.03 (-0.07;0.02)

Note. * marks $p < .05$ and ** marks $p < .01$; Gender: male coded as 1 and female as 2.

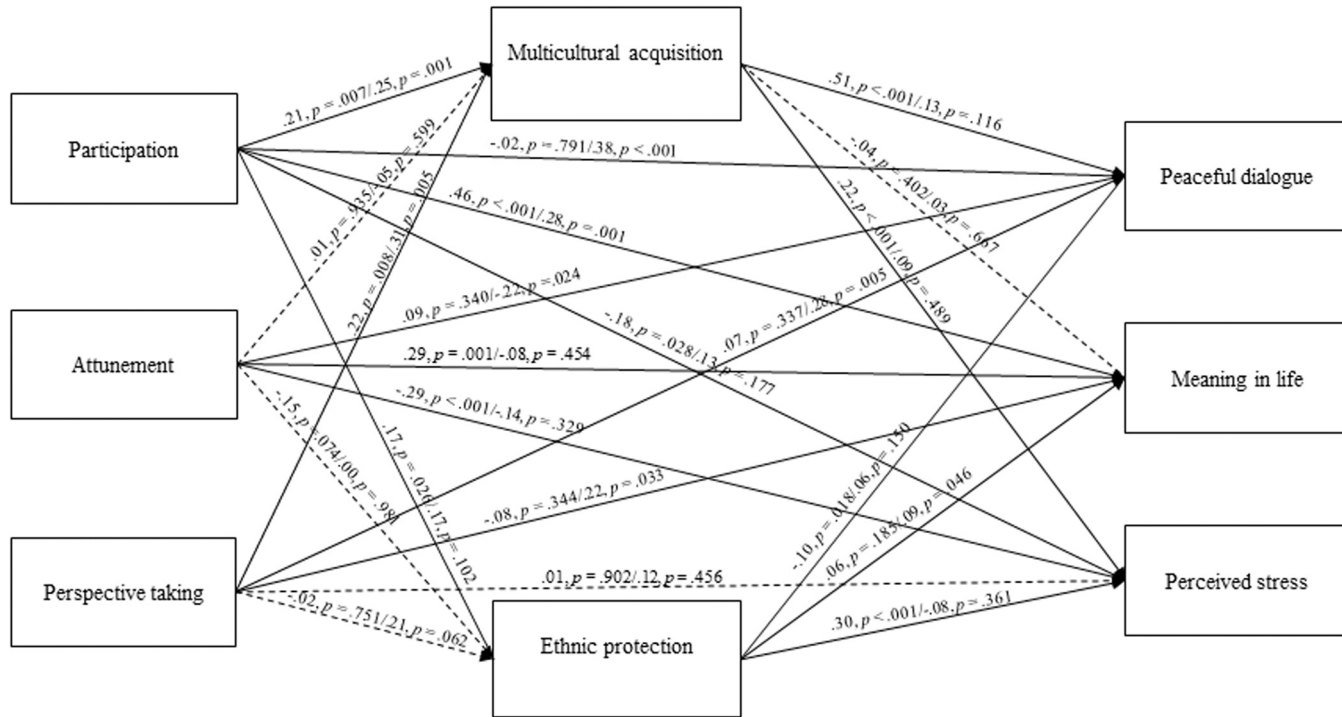


Fig. 3. Results for the indirect effects model for the three aspects of life skills. Note. Standardized coefficients are displayed. US/Pakistan. Within this model, multicultural acquisition and ethnic protection were allowed to covary, $r = -0.35$, $p < .001$ in the US sample and $r = -0.08$, $p = .507$ in the Pakistani sample.

Table 3
Path estimates and confidence intervals for the indirect effects model with three aspects of life skills.

	Multicultural acquisition		Ethnic protection		Peaceful dialogue		Meaning in life		Perceived stress	
	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)	US β (95 % CI)	Pakistan β (95 % CI)
<i>Direct effects:</i>										
Age	0.07 (-0.03;0.16)	0.05 (-0.04;0.14)	0.14* (0.03; 25)	-0.14* (-0.22; -0.05)	-0.06 (-0.16;0.04)	0.12* (0.01;0.23)	0.10 (0.01;0.18)	-0.06 (-0.18;0.06)	0.06 (-0.04;0.16)	0.00 (-0.12;0.13)
Gender	0.13* (-0.16;0.17)	0.09 (-0.02;0.21)	-0.10 (-0.22;0.01)	0.00 (-0.10;0.10)	0.01 (-0.08;0.09)	0.06 (-0.03;0.19)	-0.04 (-0.12;0.06)	0.20** (0.09;0.31)	-0.04 (-0.15;0.08)	-0.08 (-0.21;0.05)
SES	0.02 (-0.08;0.12)	0.08 (-0.01;0.16)	-0.01 (-0.13;0.11)	0.03 (-0.05;0.10)	-0.07 (-0.16;0.03)	-0.01 (-0.12;0.10)	-0.04 (-0.12;0.07)	0.03 (-0.07;0.14)	-0.04 (-0.15;0.07)	-0.09 (-0.21;0.03)
Participation	0.21** (0.06;0.37)	0.25** (0.11;0.40)	0.17* (0.02;0.33)	0.17 (-0.03;0.37)	-0.02 (-0.16;0.12)	0.38** (0.22;0.55)	0.46** (0.31;0.60)	0.28** (0.11;0.42)	-0.18* (-0.34; -0.02)	0.13 (-0.06;0.33)
Attunement	0.01 (-0.16;0.17)	-0.05 (-0.23;0.13)	-0.15 (-0.31;0.01)	0.00 (-0.14;0.15)	0.09 (-0.09;0.27)	-0.22* (-0.42; -0.03)	0.29** (0.11;0.47)	-0.07 (-0.27;0.12)	-0.29** (-0.45; -0.14)	-0.14 (-0.41;0.14)
Perspective taking	0.22** (0.06;0.38)	0.31** (0.09;0.53)	-0.02 (-0.18;0.13)	0.21 (-0.01;0.43)	0.07 (-0.07;0.22)	0.28** (0.08;0.47)	-0.08 (-0.24;0.08)	0.22* (0.02;0.41)	0.01 (-0.15;0.17)	0.12 (-0.20;0.44)
Multicultural acquisition					0.51** (0.39;0.63)	0.13 (-0.03;0.29)	-0.04 (-0.15;0.06)	0.03 (-0.12;0.18)	0.22** (0.10;0.34)	0.09 (-0.16;0.33)
Ethnic protection					-0.10*(-0.19; -0.02)	0.06 (-0.02;0.14)	0.06 (-0.03;0.14)	0.09* (0.00;0.18)	0.30** (0.18;0.42)	-0.08 (-0.25;0.09)
<i>Total and specific indirect effects:</i>										
Participation					0.09 (-0.00;0.19)	0.04 (-0.01;0.10)	0.00 (-0.03;0.03)	0.02 (-0.02;0.07)	0.10** (0.04;0.16)	0.01 (-0.07;0.09)
Through multicultural acquisition					0.11* (0.02;0.19)	0.03 (-0.02;0.08)	-0.01 (-0.03;0.01)	0.01 (-0.03;0.05)	0.05* (0.00;0.09)	0.02 (-0.04;0.09)
Through ethnic protection					-0.02 (-0.04;0.00)	0.01 (-0.01;0.03)	0.01 (-0.01;0.03)	0.02 (-0.00;0.03)	0.05 (0.00;0.11)	-0.01 (-0.06;0.03)
Attunement					0.02 (-0.07;0.11)	-0.01 (-0.03;0.02)	-0.01 (0.03;0.01)	-0.00 (-0.02;0.02)	-0.04 (-0.09;0.01)	-0.00 (-0.02;0.01)
Through multicultural acquisition					0.00 (-0.08;0.09)	-0.01 (-0.03;0.02)	0.00 (-0.01;0.01)	-0.00 (-0.01;0.01)	0.00 (-0.03;0.04)	-0.00 (-0.02;0.01)
Through ethnic protection					0.02 (-0.01;0.04)	0.00 (-0.01;0.01)	-0.01 (-0.02;0.01)	0.00 (-0.01;0.01)	-0.04 (-0.09;0.01)	0.00 (-0.01;0.01)
Perspective taking					0.11* (0.02;0.20)	0.05 (-0.02;0.13)	-0.01 (-0.04;0.02)	0.03 (-0.03;0.09)	0.04 (-0.01;0.09)	0.01 (-0.09;0.11)
Through multicultural acquisition					0.11** (0.03;0.20)	0.04 (-0.03;0.11)	-0.01 (-0.03;0.01)	0.01 (-0.04;0.06)	0.05* (0.00;0.09)	0.03 (-0.06;0.12)
Through ethnic protection					0.00 (-0.01;0.02)	0.01 (-0.01;0.03)	-0.00 (-0.01;0.01)	0.02 (-0.01;0.05)	-0.01 (-0.05;0.04)	-0.02 (-0.05;0.01)

Note. * marks $p < .05$ and ** marks $p < .01$; Gender: male coded as 1 and female as 2.

In the Pakistani sample, there was a direct and positive association between life skills and peaceful dialogue ($\beta = 0.36, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.19 \text{ to } 0.52$) as well as meaning in life ($\beta = 0.33, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.18 \text{ to } 0.48$). Furthermore, life skills were positively associated with both multicultural acquisition ($\beta = 0.49, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.29 \text{ to } 0.68$) and ethnic protection ($\beta = 0.38, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.29 \text{ to } 0.47$). Ethnic protection was positively associated with meaning in life ($\beta = 0.11, p = .030, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.01 \text{ to } 0.20$).

Evaluating the indirect effects in the U.S. sample, life skills were positively associated with peaceful dialogue ($\beta = 0.20, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.13 \text{ to } 0.26$) and perceived stress ($\beta = 0.09, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.04 \text{ to } 0.14$) through multicultural acquisition. In the Pakistani sample, life skills were positively linked with meaning in life through ethnic protection ($\beta = 0.04, p = .048, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.00 \text{ to } 0.08$).

Constraining the paths across the two national samples produced a significant decrease in model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 42.26, p < .001, \Delta\text{CFI} = 0.074, \Delta\text{RMSEA} = .145$, and $\text{SRMR} = .076$, indicating that the results significantly differ across the U.S. and Pakistani contexts.

Post hoc multi-group path analysis of the three aspects of life skills

Our hypothesized model was then examined by employing separate scores for the three aspects of life skills (participation, attunement, and perspective taking). As in the main analysis, we controlled for gender, age, and SES. The results of this fully saturated indirect effects model (Fig. 3 and Table 3) indicated that in the U.S. sample, there was a direct and positive association between participation and meaning in life ($\beta = 0.46, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.25$) and a negative relationship with perceived stress ($\beta = -0.18, p = .028, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.49 \text{ to } 0.68$). Likewise, attunement was directly and positively associated with meaning in life ($\beta = 0.29, p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.25$) and negatively with perceived stress ($\beta = -0.29, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.49 \text{ to } 0.68$). Perspective taking was not directly linked with any of the outcome variables. Participation ($\beta = 0.21, p = .007, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.24 \text{ to } 0.50$) and perspective taking ($\beta = 0.22, p = .008, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.24 \text{ to } 0.50$) were also positively associated with multicultural acquisition, but only participation was positively linked with ethnic protection ($\beta = 0.17, p = .026, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.11 \text{ to } 0.11$). Moreover, multicultural acquisition was positively associated with peaceful dialogue ($\beta = 0.51, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.39 \text{ to } 0.62$) and perceived stress ($\beta = 0.22, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.11 \text{ to } 0.35$), and ethnic protection was negatively linked with peaceful dialogue ($\beta = -0.10, p = .018, 95\% \text{ CI} = -0.19 \text{ to } -0.03$) and positively associated with perceived stress ($\beta = 0.30, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.18 \text{ to } 0.42$).

In the Pakistani sample, there was a direct and positive association between participation and peaceful dialogue ($\beta = 0.38, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.25$) and meaning in life ($\beta = 0.28, p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.49 \text{ to } 0.68$). Additionally, attunement was directly and negatively associated with peaceful dialogue ($\beta = -0.22, p = .024, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.25$), whereas perspective taking was directly and positively linked with both peaceful dialogue ($\beta = 0.28, p = .005, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.25$) and meaning in life ($\beta = 0.22, p = .033, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.25$). Furthermore, both participation ($\beta = 0.21, p = .007, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.25$) and perspective taking ($\beta = 0.31, p = .005, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.25$) were positively associated with multicultural acquisition, but none of the three aspects of life skills was significantly associated with ethnic protection. Ethnic protection was positively associated with meaning in life ($\beta = 0.09, p = .046, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.01 \text{ to } 0.20$).

Evaluating the indirect effects in the U.S. sample, participation ($\beta = 0.11, p = .012, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.19$) and perspective taking ($\beta = 0.11, p = .009, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.02 \text{ to } 0.20$) were positively associated with peaceful dialogue through multicultural acquisition. Furthermore, participation ($\beta = 0.05, p = .034, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.00 \text{ to } 0.09$) and perspective taking ($\beta = 0.05, p = .031, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.00 \text{ to } 0.09$) were indirectly associated with perceived stress through multicultural acquisition. There were no significant indirect effects in the Pakistani sample.

Constraining the paths across the two national samples produced a significant decrease in model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(22) = 153.79, p < .001, \Delta\text{CFI} = 0.244, \Delta\text{RMSEA} = .144$, and $\text{SRMR} = .103$, again indicating that the results significantly differ across the U.S. and Pakistani contexts.

Discussion

Globalization has transformed local contexts, highlighting the relevance of life skills to solve socioculturally embedded life tasks. The present study examined how generic life skills were associated with the endorsement of peaceful dialogue, meaning in life, and perceived stress through global orientations (i.e., multicultural acquisition and ethnic protection). This investigation was conducted from a cross-cultural perspective through data collection from the United States and Pakistan. The results partly supported the first hypothesis (H1) as life skills were positively associated with peaceful dialogue and meaning in life but negatively linked to perceived stress (not significant in the Pakistani sample). Partly confirming our second hypothesis, life skills were indirectly and positively associated with peaceful dialogue through multicultural acquisition in the U.S. sample; nevertheless, and partly contradicting this second hypothesis, life skills were positively associated with perceived stress through multicultural acquisition in the U.S. sample. Finally, and partly contradicting our third hypothesis (H3), life skills were only positively and indirectly associated with meaning in life through ethnic protection in the Pakistani sample. These results suggest that life skills are important competencies when navigating globalization-based acculturation and that ethnic protection reflects a more positive global orientation in the Pakistani context as compared to the United States. Accordingly, the results can be discussed in regard to the general importance of life skills vis-à-vis globalization as well as the culture-specific differences.

Life skills and adaptation to cultural globalization

As cultural traditions become less static and influential as well as increasingly diversified, achieving a meaningful, prosperous, and harmonious life trajectory is becoming an individual task that requires competencies such as generic life skills. Life-course events and

tasks that were often normatively ascribed by society (e.g., forming relationships, deciding on career, marriage) before the late 20th century are today increasingly left for individuals to solve for themselves (Jensen et al., 2011). Globalization has increased the number of available culturally informed ways of living, resulting in an increase in identity alternatives and diversified life trajectories, which further emphasizes the importance of life choices and competencies to make the right choices and reach goals in life (Ozer, 2019). Such individualization relates to a greater variety of outcomes depending on both agency and self-direction (Schwartz et al., 2013). People who have not sufficiently developed the life skills needed to navigate increasingly complex globalized societies may struggle to achieve a harmonious and meaningful way of life without the stressful experiences of being overwhelmed. This was reflected in our results, linking life skills to peaceful dialogue, meaning in life, and less perceived stress, especially in the U.S. sample.

In both samples, indirect paths linked life skills with either endorsement of peaceful dialogue through multicultural acquisition or meaning in life through ethnic protection. These findings indicate the importance of life skills in the adaptation to cultural diversity, in achieving meaning in life, and in harmonious intercultural relations. Previous research has highlighted the importance of intercultural competencies to function in a globalized world, suggesting that life skills such as perspective alteration, self-reflection, emotional coping, and interpersonal and situational sensitivity should be developed among students (Stier, 2003). Additionally, competence, agency, and life skills have been strongly associated with meaning in life and well-being as part of a self-developmental process (Martela et al., 2018; Yuen et al., 2021).

In both samples, participation (belonging and participating in social, cultural, and societal relations and communities) and perspective taking (navigating the diversity of personal, cultural, and social perspectives) rather than attunement (activity, self-efficacy in planning, and moral navigation) were associated with multicultural acquisition. Altogether, this could indicate the importance of self-development in social relations, identity and social affiliation processes, and comprehension of the diverse meaning systems inherent to a liquid and globalized modernity (Bauman, 2000) in which direction in life and self-perception are to a lesser degree derived from traditional cultural structures. Moreover, with increasing intercultural connectivity, life skills that include relationship formation and an understanding of others' perspectives, systems, and worldviews foster intercultural competencies and communication that are needed to avoid conflicts and promote intercultural harmony during cultural diversity (Guo, 2019). The positive direct and indirect (through multicultural acquisition in the U.S. sample) association between life skills and peaceful dialogue in our study highlights the basic skills that are needed to approach cultural diversity in a positive way, where an understanding of other cultural traditions and ways of life might lead to greater intercultural harmony. Nevertheless, this association between life skills and peaceful dialogue only emerged directly in the Pakistani sample and indirectly in the U.S. sample when examining the three separate aspects of life skills. This could suggest that the United States is a more globalized context compared to Pakistan and point to important contextual differences regarding globalization-based acculturation.

The local differences in reactions to globalization

Both the United States and Pakistan have to some extent been affected by cultural globalization (Gygli et al., 2019). However, there are important differences between these globalized contexts that suggest people in these distinct countries may experience and deal differently with these processes. Besides the similarities across contexts, the result of the present study might reflect the asymmetrical flow of sociocultural practices (e.g., the United States as an exporter of pop culture; Chiu et al., 2011) as well as differences in collectivism and individualism (Hofstede, 2001).

Overall, the indirect effects appear to be stronger in the United States than in Pakistan. This could reflect that the more forceful transformative effect of globalization in the United States causes greater complexity in everyday life tasks, highlighting the importance of global orientations (Chen et al., 2016). Furthermore, the primarily collectivist and less globalized context of Pakistan might support stronger communal involvement, a sense of inclusion, and sociocultural embeddedness that promotes well-being and a sense of meaning in life. Accordingly, the need for life skills to engage and adapt successfully to intercultural contact might be less prominent in the context of Pakistan. For example, in the absence of experienced discrimination, a common religious identity of being Muslim could promote positive intercultural adaptation through commitment to and being rooted in heritage culture values and identities (Phalet et al., 2018).

Within the U.S. sample—unlike the Pakistani sample—life skills were directly and negatively associated and positively and indirectly associated with perceived stress through multicultural acquisition. This result indicates that an orientation toward cultural diversity can be stressful in the U.S. context and not in Pakistan, which boasts a culturally more homogeneous context. Although these results were unanticipated, they could reflect the current tension centered on questions regarding diversity in the United States (McCoy, 2020); nevertheless, these results deviate from other research that found multicultural acquisition to be negatively linked with perceived stress in, for example, Hong Kong (Chen et al., 2016).

In the present study, meaning in life was not associated with multicultural acquisition in either sample but was positively linked with life skills through ethnic protection in the Pakistani sample. Researchers have found the presence of meaning in life to be strongly and longitudinally associated with identity commitment and identification with such identity commitments (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016). These two dimensions of identity development have been associated with local cultural endorsement in Indian contexts (Ozer et al., 2019), suggesting that local cultural rootedness and a coherent worldview would foster an experience of meaning in life through certainty of who one is in a changing world. By comparison, both multicultural acquisition and ethnic protection were linked to identification with identity commitment and in turn well-being in the Western context of Denmark (Ozer & Schwartz, 2022). Accordingly, the sense of meaning derived from cultural rootedness might be stronger in non-Western and primarily collectivist countries that experience the threat of cultural erosion to a greater extent than in Western countries.

The defensive stance toward cultural globalization reflected in the concept of ethnic protection emerged differently across the U.S.

and Pakistani contexts. In the Pakistani sample, life skills were positively and significantly associated with ethnic protection. There was also a positive association between ethnic protection and multicultural acquisition in Pakistan and a negative association in the United States. However, when decomposing life skills into the three aspects of participation, attunement, and perspective taking, only participation was positively linked with ethnic protection in the United States. As a culturally homogeneous sample, the Pakistani students at Ghazi University mainly refer to themselves by their tribal belonging, and they cherish and preserve their cultural characteristics; that said, people in Pakistan might perceive it as an important task to preserve their ethnicity in the face of globalization. Accordingly, one's self-determined abilities might be used to protect one's inherited culture from erosion by defending the integrity and vitality of Pakistani culture (Chiu et al., 2011). Within the U.S. context, local participation and communal engagement might foster a defensive reaction toward global influences. Furthermore, the defensive conception of ethnic protection could be conflated with the national culture maintenance often examined in proximal majority acculturation (Lefringhausen & Marshall, 2016). The positive association between multicultural acquisition and ethnic protection in the Pakistani sample may reflect the low degree of cultural globalization in this context. In other words, this finding might be driven by intercultural attitudes rather than actual experiences, which might foster greater bicultural distress by behaving in congruence with two (or more) cultural systems. Accordingly, individuals in this sample may not react defensively to foreign cultural influences but rather to cultural mixing perceived as cultural contamination (Torelli et al., 2011).

Limitations

The present results should be considered in light of some important limitations. First, our cross-sectional design did not permit us to draw any causal conclusions. For example, experiencing stress could shape one's interpersonal relationships and in turn one's evaluation of life skills. Second, the U.S. data was collected through Prolific, which pays test takers. Research has found such panel methods to be as reliable as data collected through traditional methods such as college student samples (Buhrmester et al., 2011); still, caution should be applied when generalizing results from such a sample and comparing it to data from a sample recruited at a college. Third, some of the measures used in our study are based on Western cultural assumptions. Such measures (e.g., Life Skills Scale) still need to be examined in non-Western contexts in regard to appropriateness and validity. Fourth, several measurements used in the present study did not include all items from the original versions of the scales (i.e., global orientation scale, peaceful dialogue, perceived stress), thus, caution should be applied when comparing results to research using the same measurements. Fifth, life skills and meaning in life yielded strong correlations ($r = 0.56$ and $r = 0.42$) and could potentially reflect tautological constructs. Nevertheless, life skills refer to competencies, but the concept of meaning in life refers to reaching self-cohesion as well as finding purpose and direction in life, which could theoretically be assumed as an outcome of employing one's life skills.

Conclusion

With cultural globalization emphasizing individual abilities to handle challenges related to sociocultural diversification, the present study examined life skills as a predictor of an endorsement of peaceful dialogue, experienced meaning in life, and perceived stress through reactions to globalization-based acculturation. Life skills emerged as adaptive capabilities for positive intercultural relations, greater meaningful life, and less perceived stress, especially in the U.S. sample. Although life skills were indirectly associated with peaceful dialogue through multicultural acquisition, they were, surprisingly, also positively and indirectly associated with perceived stress; this suggests that the integration of multicultural pluralism is a challenging task. In the Pakistani sample, ethnic protection was associated with both life skills and meaning in life, suggesting that this approach is more viable in more traditional and culturally homogeneous contexts. Overall, the study suggests that the development of life skills could be a relevant implementation in educational contexts to prepare for the contemporary challenges of navigating globalized sociocultural diversity.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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