
A STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN
MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM IN ONDO STATE

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Abstract

This paper studied intercultural communication in multicultural classrooms in Ondo State. The study was an ex-po facto research. The sample of the study consisted of 320 students, selected from ten classes in Federal Technical College, Ikare. The result obtained from the statistical analysis of the research questions indicated that cultural background did not have effect on communication among the students. The result also showed that students' cultural belief did not affect their communication in class. It was recommended, among other things, that governments at all levels should continue to encourage culture - mix in students' placement in secondary schools, in order to promote mutual co- existence among the people of Nigeria.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, multicultural classroom, social communication.

Introduction

Intercultural communication is a form of communication that aims to share information across different cultures and social groups. It is used to describe the wide range of communication processes and

problems that naturally appear within an organization or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Intercultural communication is sometimes used synonymously with cross-cultural communication. In this sense, it seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. Many people in intercultural business communication argue that culture determines how individuals encode messages, what medium they choose for transmitting them, and the way messages are interpreted (Min, 2008).

The European researcher, Daniele Trevisani, pointed out the semantic distinction between Intercultural and cross-cultural communication intercultural communication refers to the study of the “interaction” between people from different cultures, while Cross-Cultural Communication specifically refers to the comparison of how people from different cultures communicate. In other words, Cross-Cultural Communication is a “static differential image” depicting differences in communication patterns across different cultures, while Intercultural Communication studies “dynamic interactional patterns”, what happens when people from at least two different cultures meet and interact, and what “frames” are generated from this interaction, e.g. understanding vs. misunderstanding, agreement vs. disagreement, cultural adaptation vs. cultural isolation, emerging of “third cultures”, conflict vs. cooperation, intercultural team cohesiveness vs. team misunderstandings, intercultural projects success vs. projects failure, emotional improvement vs. emotional deterioration, and any other relational outcome (Trevisani, (2005).

In a broader sense, Intercultural communication encompasses cross-cultural communication, international communication, development communication, and intercultural communication; it studies situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Aside from language, intercultural communication focuses on social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people. It also involves understanding the different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries. Intercultural communication plays a

role in social sciences, such as anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, psychology and communication studies. Intercultural communication is also referred to as the base for international businesses. There are several cross-cultural service providers around who can assist with the development of intercultural communication skills. Research is a major part of the development of intercultural communication skills.

The problems in intercultural communication usually come from problems in message transmission. In communication between people of the same culture, the person who receives the message interprets it based on values, beliefs, and expectations for behavior similar to those of the person who sent the message. When this happens, the way the message is interpreted by the receiver is likely to be fairly similar to what the speaker intended. However, when the receiver of the message is a person from a different culture, the receiver uses information from his or her culture to interpret the message. The message that the receiver interprets may be very different from what the speaker intended. (Min, 2008).

Attribution is the process in which people look for an explanation of another person's behavior. When someone does not understand another, he/she usually blames the confusion on the other's "stupidity, deceit, or craziness". Effective communication depends on the informal understandings among the parties involved that are based on the trust developed between them. When trust exists, there is implicit understanding within communication, cultural differences may be overlooked, and problems can be dealt with more easily. The meaning of trust and how it is developed and communicated vary across societies. Similarly, some cultures have a greater propensity to be trusting than others. Nonverbal communication is behavior that communicates without words—though it often may be accompanied by words. Minor variations in body language, speech rhythms, and punctuality often cause mistrust and misperception of the situation among cross-cultural parties. Kinetic behavior is communication through body movement—e.g., posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact. The meaning of such behavior varies across

countries. Oculistics are a form of kinesics that includes eye contact and the use of the eyes to convey messages (Wiseman, 1989).

Proxemics concern the influence of proximity and space on communication (e.g., in terms of personal space and in terms of office layout). For example, space communicates power in the US and Germany. Paralanguage refers to how something is said, rather than the content of what is said—e.g., rate of speech, tone and inflection of voice, other noises, laughing, yawning, and silence. Object language or material culture refers to how we communicate through material artifacts—e.g., architecture, office design and furniture, clothing, cars, cosmetics, and time. In monochromic cultures, time is experienced linearly and as something to be spent, saved, made up, or wasted. Time orders life, and people tend to concentrate on one thing at a time. In polychromic cultures, people tolerate many things happening simultaneously and emphasize involvement with people. In these cultures, people may be highly distractible, focus on several things at once, and change plans often (Tibury & Henderson, 2003).

Nigeria, like many other African countries, is intrinsically multiethnic, multicultural, and has always been diverse in pre-colonial periods. The fact that it will continue to become pluralistic and diverse is obvious because of the multitude of languages heard in the streets of many towns and cities. Moreover, clothing, films, television, music are all testimonies of the growing diversity of this country (Ajitoni, 2014). In virtually every school in Ondo state, one is likely to find students not only from various ethnic groups but from diverse racial composition.

By and large, the problems of intercultural communication seem to stem from problems in message transmission. In communication between people of the same culture, the person who receives the message interprets it based on values, beliefs, and expectations for behavior similar to those of the person who sent the message. When this happens, the way the message is interpreted by the receiver is likely to be fairly similar to what the speaker intended. However, when the receiver of the message is a person from a different culture, the receiver uses information from his or her culture to interpret the message. The message that the receiver

interprets may be very different from what the speaker intended. This research therefore, investigated the effect of cultural background on the mode of friendship among the students of Federal Technical College, Ikare, Ondo State

Research Questions

1. Is there any relationship between students' cultural background and their communication in classroom?
2. Is there any relationship between students' cultural belief and classroom communication?
3. Can students' cultural background influence other students' negatively?

Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey, that employs an ex-post-facto design and that involves the determination and description of the influence of cultural background on social communication among the students. 320 students in Federal Technical College, Ikare, were used as population of the study. Data were collected through questionnaire and administered to the students, Data collected were analyzed using frequencies count.

RQ1: Is there any relationship between students' cultural background and their communication in classroom?

S/N		MEAN	STD.
1	Students from different background communicate with each other effectively	1.75	.893
2	You often gist with students from your background	1.83	.739
3	I feel okay when communicating with students of the same cultural background like me	1.66	.768

Research Question 1:

The result of data analysis revealed a mean and standard deviation scores as follows;

'You often gist with a student from your background' (1.83 ± 0.78), 'Students from different cultural background' communicate with each other effectively (1.75 ± 0.89) and I feel okay when communicating with students of the same cultural background like me' (1.66 ± 0.77). Also, the chi-square test showed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that students from different cultural backgrounds communicate with one other effectively, 'you often gist with students from your background' and 'I feel okay with communicating with students of the same cultural background like me with $p < 0.05$ respectively. These results revealed a significant relationship between cultural background and student's communication in class

RQ2. Is there any relationship between students' cultural belief and classroom communication?

S/N		MEAN	STD.
4	The cultural belief serves as barrier for students from other cultural backgrounds	2.53	.979
5	It is a taboo for me to be very close to students from other cultural backgrounds	3.02	1.005

Research Question 2:

The result showed that the majority (with observed frequency of 68) disagrees that the cultural belief serves as barrier in communicating with students from other cultural backgrounds compared to (62 observed frequency) who agreed. Also, from the result, the majority of the respondent with (observed freq. 82) strongly disagreed that "it is a taboo for me to be very close to students from other cultural backgrounds compared to (20 observed freq.)

who strongly agreed. This implies cultural beliefs and taboo to be very close and not posing any barrier to students in multicultural classrooms

RQ3: Is there any influence of students' cultural background on their communications in classroom?

S/N		MEAN	STD.
6	Students choose their friends based on cultural background	2.31	1.032
7	Cultural background is a major factor in choosing friends	2.25	1.058
8	Students from other cultural backgrounds could be trusted	2.10	.798

Research question 3:

The result (2.31 ± 1.03), (2.25 ± 1.06) and (2.10 ± 0.80) revealed the mean and standard deviation scores that students choose their friends based on cultural background and "cultural background is a major factor in choosing friends and students from other cultural background could be trusted", respectively. Also in the chi-square test result, though the majority of the respondents disagreed that students choose their friends based on cultural background and that cultural background is a major factor in choosing friends, yet the majority of the respondents agreed that students from other cultural background could be trusted, with ($p < 0.000$). This also implies that a significant relationship exists between students cultural background as their communication is clear.

Discussion

In summing up all the results and analysis from the tables and. It was observed in research question one that students from different cultural background communicate with each other effectively. This

result is in line with the findings of Oni, (2015) who posited that cultural background can't affect friendship.

Results from research question two revealed that cultural belief could not serve as barrier for effective communication by students from different cultural backgrounds. These findings are in line with the result of the research by Samovar and Parter (2004), which stated that cultural belief cannot affect communication by students from different cultural backgrounds in multicultural classroom.

Also, the findings from research question three shows that students from other cultural background could be trusted, while being communicated with. This is contrary to the findings of Jandit (2004), what stated that cultural differences can bring about distrust because only people from the same cultural background can recognize same symbol which is part of communication. Findings on research question four also revealed that cultural background cannot have negative influence on students in intercultural classroom. This is contrary to the findings of Fong (2006), who states that language influences and shapes how people perceive their world.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the study shows that though Nigeria is a country with many cultures, this does not affect communication among the students at the secondary level. It means the unity that we are agitating for can be got through the intercultural classroom setting. Therefore, it is recommended among others that government at all levels should encourage intercultural placement in all schools. Curriculum planners should also include cultural teaching in the curriculum at all levels of education so that people will appreciate other cultures which will promote unity among the people.

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