

“RESEARCH-BASED TRANSFORMATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION: TRADITION AS A BASIS FOR INNOVATION”

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THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE. DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Ibrakhimova Nilufar,
UZSWLU, English Philology Faculty,
Fing(k)-2016 group student,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan
ibrohimovanilufar@gmail.com
+998-50-074-84-48

Abstract. Today, effective intercultural communication is crucial due to the increasing significance of understanding the world's cultural diversity. Factors such as immigration, urbanization, international employment, exchange programs, and easy travel have led to frequent interactions between people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This paper aims to emphasize the importance of cultivating attitudes and communication skills essential for multicultural interactions, both in everyday life and within organizations. Acquiring knowledge about other cultures and honing intercultural communication competencies can ease multicultural encounters and foster greater openness and tolerance towards others.

Keywords: intercultural communication, globalization, intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness.

Introduction

Communication between individuals from different cultures is a phenomenon as old as history itself, manifesting through various means such as wars, commerce, and social interactions. In today's globalized world, intercultural interactions have become commonplace and necessary across various domains like education, work, healthcare, and politics. Within organizational communication, intercultural communication is a significant area of study, encompassing a wide array of issues arising from interactions between individuals of diverse religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Factors such as globalization, migration, advanced transportation and information technologies, international employment, exchange programs, and geopolitical dynamics have led to increased interactions among people of different cultures and religions, emphasizing the urgency and importance of effective intercultural communication.

Efforts to ensure world peace, stability, and sustainable resource management, as well as to promote values like tolerance and diversity, rely heavily on intercultural communication. The primary obstacle in intercultural communication lies in the differences between cultures, including language, values, behaviors, attitudes, and customs. Language is often cited as the most crucial element in effective intercultural communication, as it is both universal and culturally determined. The connection between culture and language is a subject of debate, with theories like Linguistic

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Relativity suggesting that language shapes the worldview and cognition of its speakers. English, being the third most spoken language by native speakers and widely taught as a foreign language, serves as a global lingua franca due to its convenience and widespread use. In navigating intercultural interactions, it's essential for managers and business owners to avoid discriminatory practices based on ethnocentric assumptions and instead embrace open-mindedness, receptivity to new cultural information, avoidance of stereotypes, and respect for differences as key strategies for efficient intercultural exchange.

The intercultural communication competence (ICC)

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) refers to individuals' active possession of qualities that enable effective communication across cultures, which can be defined in terms of three main components: attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

Attitudes such as respect, openness, and curiosity are essential for successful intercultural communication. Showing consideration for others, actively listening, and expressing appreciation and value are particularly important for building meaningful relationships with individuals from different backgrounds. Openness and curiosity entail a willingness to step out of our comfort zones.

Knowledge of culture, which encompasses beliefs, values, and norms influencing communication behaviors, involves various categories: sociolinguistic awareness, cultural self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge, and deep cultural understanding.

Skills such as observing, listening, analyzing, evaluating, interpreting, and relating are crucial for applying acquired knowledge effectively. Additionally, critical self-reflection is vital for developing intercultural competence.

Efficient intercultural communicationskills

Professionals in global business require strong intercultural communication skills to effectively exchange information with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds worldwide. They must consider cultural context and conventions, including the timing of communication, preferred communication distance, and differences in nonverbal cues.

Successful companies recognize diversity as both a legal and moral obligation, crucial for improving work climate, morale, creativity, and productivity. Guo-Ming Chen and William G. Starosta's model of intercultural competence (1996) identifies three perspectives:

- Intercultural sensitivity: Acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity.

“RESEARCH-BASED TRANSFORMATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION: TRADITION AS A BASIS FOR INNOVATION”

International Conference on Teacher Education

- Intercultural awareness: Understanding cultural variations and being aware of one's own cultural identity.

- Intercultural androitness: Possessing message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, flexibility, interaction management, and social skills.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) involves adapting existing communication skills to meet the specific demands of intercultural interactions, such as:

- Having strong interpersonal and interaction skills.
- Being proficient in a second language.
- Using communication technologies effectively.
- Searching, processing, and analyzing data from various sources.
- Adapting easily to new situations and environments.
- Demonstrating awareness of gender issues and promoting equal opportunities.
- Working well in multinational teams and intercultural environments.
- Exhibiting tolerance, cultural sensitivity, and awareness.
- Showing appreciation and respect for people of diverse cultures.
- Possessing knowledge about different cultures and customs.

Several theoretical approaches aim to outline the skills required for effective intercultural communication.

From a communication perspective, four skill areas are identified:

- Personality strength: Individuals need a strong sense of self and self-awareness to initiate positive communication with others.

- Communication skills: This includes message skills, where individuals must be competent in verbal and nonverbal communication, and social skills, such as empathy and maintaining identity when interacting with people from diverse backgrounds.

- Cultural awareness: Understanding the values, behaviors, and norms of a culture different from one's own, and comprehending how people from different cultures think and behave.

In the business approach, which focuses on international business skills, three key areas are emphasized:

- Self-maintenance skills: Abilities needed to maintain one's identity.

- Interpersonal skills: Necessary for communication with individuals from the host culture.

- Cognitive skills: Skills required for perceiving the host environment accurately.

The military approach, as outlined by the US Navy, identifies eight skills crucial

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for success in intercultural communication:

1. Self-awareness: Using information about oneself in multicultural situations to cope effectively.
2. Self-respect: Having self-confidence and showing respectful behavior.
3. Interaction: Effectively communicating with individuals from other cultures.
4. Empathy: Understanding the feelings and perspectives of others.
5. Adaptability: Adjusting to unfamiliar environments or different norms.
6. Certainty: Approaching contradictory situations with confidence.

In conclusion, acquiring intercultural communication competences and skills goes beyond language proficiency and cultural knowledge; attitudes and skills play equally significant roles in developing intercultural competence. Organizations need to recognize significant cultural differences in communication behaviors among employees and establish effective intercultural communication practices. Adapting to a new culture is a lengthy and intricate process, and acculturation, intercultural adaptation, and learning are most successful when both parties are actively involved and cooperative.

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