

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

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## A Multidimensional Approach to Cross-Cultural Communication

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### Abstract

The study of languages other than one's own can not only serve to help us comprehend what we as human beings have in common but also assist us in understanding the multiplicity which underlines not only our language but also our ways of constructing and organizing knowledge and the many different realities in which we all live and react.

This paper on Cross-Cultural Communication, also referred as Intercultural Communication, will focus on how people from differing cultural backgrounds communicate in similar and different ways among themselves and how they endeavour to communicate across cultures.

Now is the time to break the old cultural barriers which can be a hindrance to Global Capitalism as we want our students to be well-equipped for overseas work in a globalizing market.

This paper also focuses on the programme that should be developed to train students to understand how to act when they are abroad and how languages open many more opportunities for them and lead to a dream job.

Even with all the goodwill in the world, miscommunication is likely to happen, especially when there are significant cultural differences between communicators. Miscommunication may lead to conflict. Though English is considered the most important medium of communication, there is still need for having knowledge of other languages when communicating with people of other countries.

All communication is cultural. It draws on ways we have learned to speak and give non-verbal messages.

## **Introduction**

We live in a global village which is closely connected with the Internet. A person can find out what is happening in another country thousands of miles away, by going online. Travelling has become uncomplicated. Almost anyone can get on a plane and visit a foreign country for a quick visit or a long stay.

Even with all the access, Indian students in general, are not known for their cross-cultural competence.

Culture studies focus on comparing and contrasting two different cultures. This paper examines the aspects of cross-cultural communication and presents strategies that can be used by teachers of English in India. Apart from this, it will further suggest means to improve communication and present the importance of non-verbal communication.

Cultures provide our students ways of thinking, ways of seeing, hearing and interpreting the world. Thus the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even when they talk the same language. When the languages are different, and translation has to be used to communicate, the potential for misunderstanding increases. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cross-cultural\\_communication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cross-cultural_communication))

We all live in a culturally diverse world. So, it is obvious that our students will encounter individuals from different races, religions and nations in their day to-day encounters. Effective Communication with people of different cultures is especially challenging.

The challenge is that with all the goodwill in the world, miscommunication is likely to happen, especially when there are significant cultural differences between communicators. Miscommunication may lead to conflicts or aggravate conflicts that already exist. (Le Baron, 2003)

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to educate the students of today about cross-cultural communication and make them understand how people from different cultures communicate with each other.

There has become an increasing demand for universities across the world to integrate intercultural and international understanding and knowledge into the education of their students. International literacy and cross-cultural understanding have become critical for a country's development in all fields. It has become essential for universities to educate or, more importantly, transform to function successfully and contentedly in a world characterised by close complex relationships and overlapping borders. Students must possess certain level of global competence to understand the world they live in and how they fit into this world.

## **Origin and Development of Cross-cultural Communication**

Before delving deep into the strategies which a teacher in India should take into consideration, it is essential to know from where the study of cross cultural-communication initiated and developed. As we know man is a social animal and it's his nature to progress. So the study of cross culture communication is a result of the insatiable desire of man's progress. With the desire for growth every business wanted to expand. Therefore,

The study of cross-cultural communication was originally found within businesses and the government both seeking to expand globally. Businesses began to offer language training to their employees. Businesses also found that their employees were ill-equipped for overseas work in a globalizing market. Therefore programmes were developed to train employees to understand how to act when they are abroad.  
(<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

## **Suggestions to Enhance Cross-cultural Communication Skills**

To have a smooth pace with the globalized world, we as teachers must be master communicators who can influence young minds in positive ways. In a diverse society, there is a pressing need to communicate cross-culturally to educate students in the art of cross-cultural communication.

Communicating one's ideas is the key to knowledge. As such, it is extremely important for educators to elicit academic performance from students that is based on communication skills.

## **Fundamental Elements and Some Methods to Impart These Elements**

There are three fundamental elements which embody the spirit of cross-cultural communication:

1. Intercultural awareness
2. Intercultural sensitivity
3. Intercultural communication competence.

### **Intercultural Awareness**

For a student, intercultural awareness and learning is a must. It can be possible only when such learning is integrated in the curriculum along with language learning. Through the development of intercultural awareness, the students will learn to identify and accept similarities and differences. Teachers need to plan lessons on cultural awareness. They can also improve intercultural awareness by methods of instruction like - field trips, reading assignments and watching drama.

### **Intercultural Sensitivity**

You are culturally sensitive if you are able to look at different cultures from their cultural frame-of reference, rather than from yours. You have

cultural empathy. Not only in your thoughts, but you know your limits, you are able to move between multiple frames-of-reference, without losing your identity, with great cultural flexibility and respect. (IS: FDTIC, pg 69)

Students must learn to respect and tolerate cultural differences of their peers and also have an understanding to gain access to people of the other cultures. Being able to walk in another person's shoes is an acquired ability that takes training and practice. Teachers should adopt methods of instruction that enhance intercultural sensitivity like role playing, group discussion and paired exercise.

### **Intercultural Communication Competence**

The components of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups, values which are a part of one's belonging to a given society. (DICIP, p. 5)

If a student inculcates these values, it will not only improve his tolerance level but also develop his intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Communication competence reflects having the ability to negotiate and interact well across cultures. Methods of instruction that can be implemented by teachers for this purpose are reading, writing and speaking. Apart from this, by increasing the level of discussions and brainstorming in the classroom, a teacher can expect students to make cultural connection that may last forever.

### **Preparing the Curriculum and the Syllabus and Their Implementation**

As an educator, it is our responsibility to ensure that our classroom supports intercultural awareness, sensitivity and communication competence. Without an understanding of cultural diversity, it is possible for teachers to neglect the different needs of every student. Developing curriculum that addresses cross-cultural communication is one solution to this ever present problem.

Designing the right lesson plan is not enough. Teachers must use the plans consistently and make sure that students understand learner objective/s. If such a thing is done, it will ensure that students are focused on academic success as they gradually develop the capacity to tolerate other's differences. This can be done by using cultural contexts for class activities and testing the students on their comprehension of other cultures.

A teacher who wishes to raise cross-cultural awareness should teach the students the basic tenets of acquiring culture and the problems of miscommunication that can happen when people from different cultures interact. Teachers should play the role of informants in guiding the students about other cultures by providing them such study material and motivate their interest in the comparative study of cultures. They can use international projects that promote language learning as well as cross-cultural competence. These projects often involve writing to students in a different country. They can also have video presentations and photo reviews. They can use self made material to explore a particular cultural focus in depth and also learn with and from others.

## Communication Skills Needed for Academic Success

A major responsibility of teachers at all grade levels is to teach the language and communication skills needed for academic success, and for career and social mobility. It's rightly said that by the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1827: "Whoever is not acquainted with foreign language knows nothing of his own". The study of languages, other than one's own can not only serve to help the students understand what they as human beings have in common, but also assist them in understanding the diversity which underlines their language and knowledge.

### What Should the Teachers Do?

We as teachers can train the students to explore the cultures and communication conventions of those whom they propose to meet. They will curtail the risk of making the elementary mistakes. It is also prudent to set a clear agenda so that everyone understands the nature and purpose of the interaction.

When language skills are unequal, clarifying one's meaning in five ways will improve communication.

1. **Choosing words carefully:** At times words spoken can be misinterpreted. Therefore, students should avoid using slang and idioms, and choose words that will convey only the most denotative meaning.
2. **Listening skills:** Poor listening skills can disrupt a student's communication. They should listen carefully and if in doubt, ask for confirmation of understanding. Listening skills will also help the student to read the body language of the other.
3. **Accent and Tone:** Keeping the tone into consideration is equally important. Students should recognize the accenting and intonation carefully. It may cause meaning to vary significantly.
4. **Behaviour and Body language:** Customs and culture should be respected and the students should also be aware of the local communication formalities and styles, and watch for any changes in behaviour and body language.
5. **Knowledge of literature:** Students should have a thorough knowledge about the other cultures before entering into any kind of a communication with them. This can be possible when they examine also the other's culture perception to their own culture by reading literature about cultures through their eyes before entering into communication with them.

### Impact of Kinesics and Non-verbal Communication

Hence, as our planet ages and communities become more multicultural, it is the classrooms that have to reflect a global society where students must gain knowledge to interact and generate harmony.

Students are coming to class with an increasing diversity of cultural communication styles, multicultural values and non-verbal communication behaviour that may be unfamiliar to teachers.

It is a daunting task for teachers to improve cross-cultural communication competence and to teach students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Teachers need to raise their awareness of important differences in non-verbal communication which includes kinesics, between cultures especially those that have a direct impact on teaching and learning in the multicultural classroom.

Non-verbal communication can be very challenging. If the message is not translated correctly, it might lead to serious misunderstanding. Communicating efficiently is essential as it will also influence our relationship with others.

Communication is interactive, so an important influence on its effectiveness is our relationship with others.

Do they hear and understand what we are trying to say? Are they listening well? Are we listening well in response? Is their mood positive and receptive? Not only these, there are a hundred questions that come in our mind. The answers to all such questions will give us some clues about the effectiveness of our communication and the ease with which we may be able to move through any kind of conflict. (Le Baron, 2003)

Non-verbal communication is hugely important in any interaction because we tend to look for non-verbal cues when verbal messages are vague or ambiguous.

Non-verbal communication is defined by anything consisting of eye contacts, facial expressions, and patterns of touch, gestures, spatial arrangements, and tones of voice, expressive movements, head nodding, and even hand shaking.

When a student first learns to speak a second language, he may be deterred from fluency by his non-verbal signs. "Changing with each culture", is the translated definition of body language. When at first exposed to a new environment where attitudes, language and behaviour are all unfamiliar, students may often suffer from cultural shock.

As with varying meanings from country to country, it is easy for misunderstandings to occur. Thus culture influences every aspect of non-verbal communication. Equally as vital to convey a message or an image, it is important to understand how performing smooth interaction requires eloquence and articulacy with not only spoken language but with visual as well.

## **Conclusion**

Therefore we see that the study of cross-cultural communication, verbal and non-verbal, is fast becoming a global research area. With the increasing pressures and opportunities of globalisation, many universities from around the world are taking great strides in intercultural understanding through process of organizational change and innovations. They are taking immense pains to incorporate such understanding and knowledge in the education of their students.

Thus, to keep in pace with time, universities need to make sure that they are open and responsive to changes in the outside environment. They need to be in progress with cultural changes and be prepared to adapt to these changes. If our students will not have understanding of different cultures then how will they communicate effectively? Cross Cultural Communication will definitely enhance the personality of a student; make him more confident and competent enough in today's globalised world.

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