



## Intercultural Communication Challenges in Group Work: A Case Study of Undegraduates Students of Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science & Technology

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### ABSTRACT

The study focuses on investigation of the intercultural communication challenges faced by the students during the group tasks. The aim of the study is to address the challenges encountered by the students in intercultural team work setting. The study uses qualitative method and investigates the data using Byram's model of inter-cultural communication. The data is collected through stratified interviews from students of Quaid-e-Awam University, Nawabshah belonging to Engineering and English departments. The questionnaire was based on open-ended items. The paper discusses in detail the challenges faced due to cultural diversity and the hindrances it posits on communication in group work. The paper discusses the factors causing the obstacles to reach the goal in teamwork and their appropriate solutions. The study suggests strategies to overcome the cross-cultural challenges to improve communication.

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## INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process by which individuals share their ideas, knowledge, thoughts, and feelings with each other in order to gain knowledge, understand the behaviour of other people, and gain experience. Through effective communication, vocabulary is enhanced and linguistic problems are solved, which are encountered in daily conversation. Intercultural communication is the process through which individuals from different cultural backgrounds attempt to negotiate shared meanings in interaction (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). Intercultural communication is processed between people having different cultural backgrounds. As the people have different cultural backgrounds, they have different languages, cultural norms and traditions.

The major focus of intercultural communication is globalization and multicultural workforce. This paper focuses on the intercultural communication challenges encountered by students in group tasks. The barriers and obstructions holding students of different cultures from performing effectively such as language, cultural beliefs, religion, ethnic groups, prejudices, and historical conflicts. The paper investigates the situation where people who are unlikely to work together are bound to work, consequently; the challenges they would face and the strategies they would construct to perform are dealt with.

If we consider a person working in a group consisting of people from different cultures, that person will face some challenges when sharing ideas and his point of view with his group members because of linguistic barriers (Neuliep, 2017). Intercultural communication is an asset in globalized world. With evolution, cultures have been mingled, and it has become very important for survival to come into contact with different cultures. Thus, intercultural communication emerged (Samovar et al., 2008).

(McLuhan, 1960). Technology has connected every individual with each other, the world has also become very much interconnected and interdependent. Multicultural identities are working on a single platform. Therefore, the demand for intercultural communication has incessantly increased.

### Research Objectives

1. To find the challenges in intercultural communication faced by the students during the team work.
2. To find strategies to avoid communication challenges in intercultural setting.

### Scope of Study

Intercultural communication is a widely discussed subject of modern century. The advent of technology, modernization, and globalization has resulted in convenience of the communication among the people from various parts of the world for business, education, tourism and other purposes. This study investigates the challenges faced by majority of the individuals during the intercultural communication. In this connection, the study is important because of its requirement in present times. By analyzing the collected data, it was analyzed that what challenges students are facing while communicating

with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, and this research suggests the techniques and methods to resolve the challenges of students.

### Research Limitations

The study is limited to find intercultural challenges of team work. It analyses the hindrances due to cross-cultural differences in the learning outcomes. Further Research can be conducted on obstruction in any specific setting such as classroom as well as the study can also be conducted on the reasons provided in this study, such as intercultural communication challenges due to language barrier.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural communication is an important asset in growing interaction through globalization. It is a lifelong and incessant process of learning and adaptability. Intercultural communication has increased its importance in today's world. Since its significance has increased with each passing day, Intercultural awareness is very helpful in the self-development and critical thinking capabilities of an individual. Humans by nature have doubts about the humanness of other humans therefore, intercultural competence helps to make people aware of the evolution humans have come across throughout history. The growing globalization has caused a large number of people to migrate in societies with a completely different cultures and norms. In the quest for this adjustment, people face challenges and hindrances such as cultural bumps, culture shocks, language, stereotypes, biases, and other practices. Several researchers have presented their theories and models to acquire the aspects of intercultural communication to minimize the barriers hindering in intercultural effectiveness.

Byram (1997) proposed his model to reduce the cross cultural prejudices and ease them in an intercultural setting. Byram's model emphasizes on the importance of intercultural communication skills for successful outcomes. Byram's model of intercultural competence involves five aspects: knowledge, attitude, interpreting and relating skills, critical cultural awareness, and intercultural competence. Byram's model is a theoretical model of improvising intercultural communication in academic terms (Muller & Marita, 2007). The model states that in order to enhance intercultural competence in an educational context, the individual should first have knowledge of diverse cultures. In order to perform effectively in intercultural settings, the learner must have acquaintances of his as well as other cultures. Secondly, the individual should have a positive attitude toward cultural values. Thirdly, he should be able to relate to and distinguish between the different cultures, and lastly, he should have to view the cultural differences through all lenses and scopes. Byram's suggests that this model can help in educational as well as other intercultural contexts.

(Baker, 2011) Proposed his model of intercultural competence. Bakers' model encompasses the following components: respect, openness, and curiosity, and discovery of other cultural nuances. Bakers' model provides a

framework for intercultural competence. The model suggests the skills required to attain competency in intercultural communication. In order to meet this need, he suggested three aspects: intercultural awareness, Baker considers intercultural awareness to be a crucial aspect. This involves learning languages, He stresses that English as Lingua Franca (ELF) serves as a vehicle to become aware of diverse cultures in the modern world, but it is not solely the language that can help to make the communication effective and successful. Worldly views, norms, and beliefs of other cultures are very important to carry out effective intercultural communication. Cultural awareness can be acquired through respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery.

(Deardorff, 2006) states in his pyramid model of intercultural competence that in order to attain the desired outcome, one must begin from the bottom of his pyramid (attitude), which includes respect, openness, and curiosity leading to the second stage, knowledge and comprehension, which is the stage of building cultural awareness and skills through observation, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and relationship. Using those skills, an individual possessing flexibility, adaptability, and ethno relationship (Showing flexibility for the diverse cultural differences) can achieve the desired external outcomes (effective intercultural communication).

## METHODOLOGY

The research has been conducted using qualitative methodology. The data is collected using semi-structured interviews from the Students of BS English, BS Chemistry, and BE Electronics from Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science, and Technology, Nawabshah. The stratified sampling was done from these institutions; the sample size was 25. Tape recorders and note-taking were used as instruments in the study. The collected data is analyzed through application of Byram's model. On the basis of literature review, research objectives and research questions, the questionnaire was designed to fulfill the needs. The questionnaire comprised of six items in two parts, each part is based on one research objective. First part includes three items to find the challenges of intercultural communication in group work and second part also contained three items to find the strategies to overcome the challenges in intercultural communication

## RESULTS

The collected data from different people who have experienced challenges of intercultural communication in group work. Following are the findings from the data.

### Diverse Cultural Background

It is one of the challenges that students are facing while working in groups, as in a group there are multicultural students having varied cultural backgrounds, therefore each and every student feels hesitation to interact with each other. Students often feel that the listener has different attitude because of cultural difference and feel that he should have to talk in limits. Respondent no: 5 and 6 highlighted the issue during their interview that they faced different challenges like stereotypes and biases during their team work. While,

suggesting the solutions they stated that by showcasing the flexible approach and respect to others culture helped them in maintaining a friendly relationship.

### ***Language Barrier***

In intercultural setting, Cultural diversity posits issues such as language variation leading to hindrance in successful communication. Consequently the pronunciation and vocabulary variation is major challenge that students frequently encounter due to cultural differences. As a result, students will face difficulties in communicating with each other and they won't be able to share their ideas and knowledge with one another.

### ***Less Interaction***

Students feel less need to talk with those having different cultural backgrounds, and because of that, they don't interact with those people. This less interaction restricts people from sharing knowledge with each other, discussing their problems, and understanding each other's emotions. Allport's intergroup contact theory (1954) suggests that interaction between groups can reduce prejudice and improve relationships, but only if the interaction is positive and involves equal status, common goals, and institutional support. Respondent no: 1,3,5, and 11 suggested that in order to overcome the challenge of less interaction due to cultural difference, they used to carry out the communication on topic of mutual interests.

### ***Ethnocentrism***

This issue arises because of human's psyche, it depends upon different thoughts that a human mind has about some culture. Some students have negative thoughts about some other cultures. Ethnocentrism can lead to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, which can hinder collaboration and create conflict within a group (Triandis, 2001). Because this, students prefer not to talk with people that belong to a culture that has flaws according to their perspective. This restricts their ability to communicate with students from other cultures. Respondent no: 2 and 4 suggested that they maintain friendly relations with their team members to avoid ethnocentrism especially racism. In order to gain this feat they show interest in learning each other's culture.

### ***Lack of Confidence***

It is a major challenge now a days that most people are facing in their daily lives as well as in academics. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) on willingness to communicate (WTC) indicates that students with low confidence are less likely to engage in communication, which can result in isolation and underperformance in group work. Bandura's (1997) study on self-efficacy states that students with low confidence are likely to perform less in the group activities especially in cross-cultural settings where they have fear of getting ridiculed. Respondent no: 9 suggested that due to ethnocentric challenges they had to face lack of confidence in front of speakers of high cultures. In suggesting the solutions, they suggested that by taking small steps (phatic communication).

## DISCUSSION

This paper highlights the challenges that students faced while working in groups consisting of people from different cultural backgrounds. In a classroom, where the students studying have different cultures, norms and traditions, they encounter challenges in order to interact with their teachers as well as their classmates. In a classroom setting, it occurs that the teacher and student are unable to share their desired message due to an intercultural communication gap. Students, despite having the knowledge, are unable to answer because of the intercultural communication barriers. Likewise, when students are given a task by their teachers to perform in the group, they also experience challenges in sharing their ideas with one another because they have different languages, cultural norms, and traditions. The solutions to all the issues discussed above: Diverse cultural backgrounds, language barrier, less interaction, ethnocentrism, lack of confidence are as follows:

### Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

The solution to overcome diverse Cultural Backgrounds is to communicate more and more with your group members, because by using that technique, you can clear your conflicts and will feel comfortable talking with each other.

### *Attitudes (Savoir-être)*

This involves showing curiosity and openness towards other cultures, accepting that cultural differences exist without making judgments. Students need to adopt an attitude of respect and curiosity towards their peers from different cultural backgrounds. This openness can help them overcome hesitation and make it easier to interact with each other, fostering a more inclusive group dynamic.

### *Knowledge (Saviors)*

Understanding the cultural norms, values, and social practices of other cultures, including one's own. Students should acquire knowledge about their peers' cultural backgrounds, including their communication styles and social norms. This understanding can reduce misunderstandings and help students navigate cultural differences more effectively.

### Language Barrier

The solution to that issue is that a person should have some awareness about unknowing culture and language. Students should learn that language and also some vocabulary about that language. By doing so, students will somehow overcome the issue of language barrier and will be able to talk with students from different cultures.

### *Skills of Interpreting and Relating (Savoir comprendre)*

The ability to interpret and relate messages from different cultural perspectives, understanding the meaning within the context of the other culture. Students should develop skills to interpret language and

communication patterns that are different from their own. This could involve understanding different accents, idioms, or non-verbal cues. They should also relate these differences to their own language and cultural norms, bridging gaps in communication.

#### ***Skills of Discovery and Interaction (Savoir Apprendre/Faire)***

The ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and its practices and to operate effectively in real-time communication. Students can practice learning new vocabulary or expressions from each other's languages and use them in interactions. This skill helps them to engage more effectively in multilingual group settings, reducing the language barrier.

#### **Less Interaction**

Taking to the students of different cultures in order to perceive knowledge from them. Communicating with society, with different people, will help to gain something either in the form of knowledge or experience. Overcoming ethnocentric tendencies and being willing to engage with others despite cultural differences. Encouraging a positive attitude towards frequent interaction with peers from different cultures can help reduce the tendency to avoid communication. By valuing the opportunity to learn from others, students will be more motivated to engage in discussions.

#### ***Skills of Discovery and Interaction (Savoir apprendre/faire)***

Enhancing the ability to engage with new cultural experiences and interact with people from diverse backgrounds. Teachers and group leaders can design activities that require students to interact and collaborate, thus encouraging more interaction and reducing cultural isolation within the group.

#### **Ethnocentrism**

To overcome that challenge, one has to know properly each and every thing about a culture about which you have some negative conflicts. Exploring more about that culture because when it easily clear your conflicts, but for all that, you have to have long conversations with the people.

#### ***Critical Cultural Awareness (Savoir s'engager)***

The ability to critically evaluate cultural practices, including one's own, in relation to others, and the willingness to engage in dialogue and negotiation with other cultural perspectives. To address ethnocentrism, students need to develop the ability to critically reflect on their own cultural biases and assumptions. By promoting discussions on cultural diversity and encouraging students to challenge stereotypes, ethnocentric attitudes can be reduced, leading to more respectful and open communication

#### ***Knowledge (Saviors)***

Deepening understanding of cultural diversity and the social, historical, and political contexts that shape cultural practices. Providing students with

knowledge about the cultures they are interacting with can help them understand why certain behaviors or attitudes exist. This understanding can mitigate ethnocentric views and promote more empathetic communication.

### **Lack of Confidence**

The specific way in which this issue can be resolved is to respect everyone's Culture and language. Try to encourage others to come forward by respect for their culture. Don't make fun of others in any perspective.

### ***Skills of Interpreting and Relating (Savoir Comprendre)***

The ability to interpret one's own and others' communication styles and to relate them appropriately. Students lacking confidence might benefit from learning how to interpret their own communication behaviors in the context of intercultural interaction. Understanding that differences in language and expression are normal can help boost their confidence in group work.

### ***Critical Cultural Awareness (Savoir s'engager)***

Engaging in self-reflection and gaining awareness of one's own communication strengths and weaknesses in intercultural contexts. Encouraging students to reflect on their own experiences and to see the value in their contributions can help build confidence. Creating a supportive environment where students are encouraged to express themselves without fear of judgment is crucial.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It has been analyzed from all perspectives, the sheer need of communication in our daily lives, whether in academics and business or at every stage of life. In consideration of the whole research, It can be said that communication is the basement of your upbringing, at the academic and professional level. During the research on the challenges faced by students, different attitudes and views by the students were observed that they experienced during their group work, and different techniques were suggested to overcome the challenges. Intercultural communication is essential to raise awareness about different cultures. In multicultural or multilingual society, it is important to communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds along with giving respect to their cultures, to get awareness, achievement, and survive in the society.

Applying Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence in this research highlights the importance of developing specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills to overcome challenges in intercultural communication. By fostering curiosity, building cultural knowledge, improving interpretative and relational skills, and encouraging critical reflection, students can become more competent intercultural communicators. This competence helps to mitigate the issues related to diverse cultural backgrounds, language barriers, less interaction, ethnocentrism, and lack of confidence in group work settings.

## FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so further research needs to be done on the topic "Intercultural Communication Challenges in Group Work: A Case Study of Undegraduates Students of Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science & Technology."

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