

Intercultural Competence for Education at all Levels

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ABSTRACT

Current British education means completing set assignments and exams to examine a prescribed curriculum with little room for personal development and individuality. Passing tests does not guarantee students can apply learning in real situations. Currently, 150 American schools have negotiated portfolios of evidence to universities and employers rather than Grade Point Averages (GPA). Portfolios demonstrate personal, practical and academic achievements more clearly than arbitrary tests. Future education must centre around life-competencies and how to be contributing citizens in our complex multicultural societies, based on individual talents and interests. It must focus on thinking, communication and practical application of knowledge and understanding. This requires reviewing everything we know and recognise about formal learning. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine this situation in order to reveal the importance of intercultural competence at all levels of education. as for the method used by researchers in order to answer these problems is a mixed method. The results show that we need to make communication a priority to achieve intelligence, insight, and reduce the distance between cultures.

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Introduction

The World Bank report “*The education crisis: Being in school is not the same as learning*” (World Bank, 2019), suggests many reach adulthood with no basic competencies, so that 56% are unable to be fully productive in life. It stresses that educators generally are not given the knowledge to cope with the huge range of human diversity and multiculturalism now found in many countries. The United Nations 75 Digital Report 2020 suggests that 87% of people globally think that for education to improve there must be better intercultural communication and cooperation. Endorsing views, two World Economic Forum 2020 reports state it is deplorable that trans-missive, lecture-based approaches dominate and so teachers must be trained to re-define their role and focus on learners becoming contributing members of society, by helping them to become aware of their specific interests and talents. Chances to learn how to communicate and cooperate in project-based, relevant learning facilitate personal, practical and academic development (United Nations, 2020). The Global Technology Governance Summit (Di Caro, 2021) shows how diversity, equity and inclusion have failed, so attention must be given to equality issues, which have political, educational, social and technological features. Students deserve an integrated education that challenges and inspires life-long learning and assists them in coping with other values and views.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) suggests Britain has made the slowest educational progress in their group nations, because memorisation remains the main learning strategy in a narrow, exam driven culture (Schleicher, 2020). Education today is not about teaching people something, but helping them develop a compass to integrate personal, practical and academic competencies. Work-readiness requires an understanding of globalisation and multiculturalism, coming from mobility, partnerships and collaboration. Education must rebalance to develop a more holistic, world approach for surviving life, by fixing on real not abstract issues.

An OECD paper reports schools and colleges will never return to former teaching ways following the 2020 pandemic, with 50% preparing for blended learning (Bertling, Rojas, Alegre, & Faherty, 2020). This requires ongoing professional development to monitor new teaching modes, using practitioner recording models to review evidence with colleagues. Since 60% or more students worldwide do not reach required educational standards, it is vital to review policies and practices (Luckin, 2020). We are not there yet, but if brave enough to do things differently it is possible.

Basically, research on intercultural competence has been carried out by many previous researchers, for example research conducted by (de Hei, Tabacaru, Sjoer, Rippe, & Walenkamp, 2020; Tomozeiu, Koskinen, & D’Arcangelo, 2016; Yu, 2012). The research that has been conducted focuses on the college level as its object which is associated with the education and training model. The results of these studies show an increase in the quality of competency development from the students themselves. Seeing the results of previous research that only focuses on universities as its object, the researcher feels that the research needs to be developed in a deeper direction in terms of its object. Therefore in this paper the researcher will try to look at intercultural competence at various levels of education.

As for seeking information or obtaining information to answer the research problem, in this case the researcher uses a mixed method between qualitative and quantitative methods. where in this case the researcher obtained data by observing and also conducting questionnaires to sources considered relevant by the researcher.

Method

Research context

This research was conducted in order to see how intercultural competence is at all levels of education. In practice, this research uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. This mixed method is used by researchers in order to obtain more concrete data regarding the problem under study (Sandelowski, 2000). The data collection methods carried out in this study, namely by means of observation and also questionnaires on the object of research. The results of the questionnaire in quantitative research were then combined with qualitative data and then explained narratively. As Creswell & Clark state "mixed methods research is a research design (or methodology) in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and mixes (integrates or relates) quantitative and qualitative data in a single research or multi-stage program of inquiry" (Almeida, 2018).

Instrument and data collection

The data used in this study were obtained from various data sources or references considered relevant to the research problem. As for the data sources referred to in this study, namely primary data sources and secondary data sources. primary data sources or main data data sources obtained by researchers from field observations and also questionnaires to data sources or informants. while the secondary data sources used in this study were obtained from the results of literature reviews, both reviews of books, journals and so on.

Data analysis

In a study, after all the data has been collected, the next stage is called data analysis techniques. Data analysis techniques in mixed methods are divided into several categories such as connecting qualitative data with quantitative data by retaining numbers and words in each data set. As for other techniques from this mixed method, namely by transforming data into a set, for example, qualitative data is converted into quantitative data and vice versa (Sandelowski, 2000). As for the data analysis technique used in this study, namely data analysis techniques by connecting qualitative data with quantitative data while maintaining the numbers and also the words in each data to then be explained in a narrative.

Findings

The World Reality

Life is full of surprises! On New Year's Day, 2023, the United Kingdom (UK) media reported: the government loses 50 laptops and phones a week; only 6% of citizens live in a true democracy; in 3 days British bosses make more money than average workers earn in a year; graduates resort to crime after failing to get jobs; pets get better medical care than people; youngsters play for only an hour weekly; a tourist is berated for being "British" and the first "Children's Capital of Culture" is in a town exposed for grooming them! Such facts show a culture out of kilter, with only 9% of UK workers feeling motivated, citing management disrespect, dishonour and deceit (PwC, 2022). Is it too much to ask for communicative, caring, able leaders? In an inspiring Polo Europa 2022 Peace conference, the Dalai Lama echoed world polls that 87% of people want better communication across cultures for humanity to thrive and survive. Our plural societies must make this top priority, to reduce tensions arising from differing languages and lifestyles. Studies clarify the complex nature of culture, along with its benefits, burdens and bullet cures, to make life more beneficial for everyone. Not a moment is to be lost in pursuing this goal!

Japan's education system has played a central role in enabling it to quickly absorb Western ideas, science and technology in the Meiji period (1868-1912). It has also been key to their recovery and rapid economic growth since World War 11. However, like all nations, Japan faces challenges from changing cultural norms, advances in science and technology, economic globalisation and an unstable business context. Nurturing people to cope with this situation is a critical task and the reason for the UK-Japan Dialogue, Innovation, Achievement and Learning initiative – DIAL (Sage, Rogers, & Cwenar, 2012). There is much to share as monocultural Japan has high academic achievement compared with Britain, which in return offers long-term experience of dealing with a multi-ethnic society. The Japanese devote primary attention to social, ethical and personal development and have escaped the pendulum swing between this and academic rigour that blights the UK system. Their practices build personal commitment to responsible behaviour, rather than reliance on rewards and punishments as is common in Britain. In some schools students do all the teaching to acquire the oral narratives for higher level thinking and the secondary linguistic literacy and numeracy levels. In the picture below is a seven-year old boy teaching science to a class of 60 students. He has developed 10 tasks for groups of 6 to look at the effect of one substance on another. Here, the ten groups are feeding back the results and the teaching assistant (another student) is writing these up on the board.



Figure 1. Teaching and learning activities in class

The view is that: “talk ensures participation in common understanding”, in line with the *Communication Opportunity Group Strategy* (Sage, 2000), initiated by the UK Medical Research Council to deal with learning problems. This scheme supported Japan’s need to develop English teaching, as well as assisting the cognitive-linguistic growth of slow learners. Translation of the approach into Japanese made collaboration possible and profitable.

A study assessed the thinking and communication of 3-4 year old Japanese and English children to predict future learning. Ability to process and produce a quantity of ideas effectively and complete tasks requiring spatial and number concepts is fundamental to personal and academic success. Judging this communicative competence at school entry assists in evaluating the role and influence of both the educational system and society’s values in raising educational achievement. Quantitative and qualitative analyses found Japanese pupils outperforming UK ones on thinking and expressive tasks at all age levels on both language word and number tasks. Some language word data only is shown below.

Table 1. A Comparison of English and Japanese on Language Tasks

	Eng 1 Jap 2	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Language	England	55	36.31	1997.00
	Japan	55	74.69	4108.00
	Total	110		

Table 1a

	Language
Mann-Whitney U	457.000
Wilcoxon W	1997.000
Z	-6.327
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Table 2. Correlations between General Knowledge and Story Retelling for English and Japanese

		Total Story
Total General Correlation	Pearson	.311(**)
Knowledge	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	110

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3. Comparisons between Males and Females on Language Tasks for English and Japanese

	Male	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Female				
Language	Male	56	20.75	6.976	.932
	Female	54	20.04	7.098	.966

There is a significant difference between Japanese and English on the Language tasks at $p=0.000$. This was seen in class when Japanese were more able to spontaneously retell their life experiences. The English found narrative difficult and most pupils struggled to assemble information. Percentage statistics for Language tasks are table 4.

Table 4. Percentage English and Japanese Children answering General Knowledge Questions Correctly

Questions	England%	Japan%
How old are you?	81	98
What animal barks?	32	71
What do you use spoon/chopsticks for?	47	91
When do you go to bed?	43	78
What is bigger – a cat or a mouse?	12	71

It is surprising that 19% of U.K. children between 3-4 years do not know how old they are. Understanding the 'self' comes before that of the world. This inadequate general knowledge correlates with data from senior school children and since this is such an important ability in dealing with normal information gaps in narrative it is an issue that requires urgent attention in learning.

Evidence indicates that traditional values for learning are more easily preserved in the relatively homogeneous Japanese society, with a collegiate culture (*way of life*) promoting communication and cooperation. A philosophy of respect, peace and calm is reflected in Japan's schools, with a natural, practical approach to learning. Parents understand their role in facilitating informal communication and learning, expecting teachers to formalise this and promote group interactions and shared understanding. Communicating is considered a whole process of transmitting messages with linguistic components not singled out as in UK practice. Hansei (reflection) encourages teachers to be "*guides by sides*" rather than "*sages on stages*" and pupils to think and act without adult help. Eastern and Western cultures

have different values, communication and teaching styles, which affect educational achievement variously. In Japan, teachers rely more on non-verbal communication to get over information and promote dialogue with students in interactive class talk and collective practice. I will never forget the sight of student groups working on **one** picture. Sharing ideas produced art of a higher standard than seen in UK learners of the same age. In Britain, the reverse is the case with individuality valued throughout the system and teacher talk dominating, transmitting knowledge mainly in words.

Both Japanese and English schools have similar layouts, operating government agendas for physical, mental, emotional and social development. However, classroom communication styles of each country differ. The Japanese describe these as “dry” or “wet” ways of interacting (*dorai & uetto*). A “dry” manner is rational, logical and unemotional; a “wet” one is personal, emotional and interpersonally complex. Observation illustrates Japan’s “wet” in contrast to Britain’s “dry” classroom practice. Japanese students manage and control their own learning because communication with themselves and others takes priority over curriculum content. Learner needs to feel competent, autonomous and authentic beings within their community are recognised and met by teachers providing relevant opportunities. Therefore, the Japanese are generally better equipped to organise thinking and expression than British counterparts. With school and college activities based on their interests and experience, students apply knowledge with understanding. Preschools are packed with pleasures rather than pressures of the UK Foundation Curriculum to accelerate literacy and numeracy. The tables below show the differences in the styles of teacher questioning in English and Japanese schools.

Table 5. A comparison of teacher questions in 11 English and Japanese schools in Maths lessons of 50 minutes duration – to whole class, small group **or individuals**

Question Type	Mean - England	Mean - Japan
Instructional	36	12
Factual	43	10
Exploratory	6	26
Total:	85	48

Table 6. A comparison of teacher questions in 11 English and Japanese schools in English lessons of 50 minutes duration – to whole class, small group or individuals

Question Type and e.g.	Mean - England	Mean - Japan
Instructional (Complete 10 sentences before 10 o'clock)	45	14
Factual (What colours are in the rainbow?)	43	16
Exploratory (Why do you think we come to school?)	11	30
Total:	99	60

Therefore, to raise performance, it is suggested that learner “needs” must precede society’s ‘wants’. Communication should be prioritised and promoted as a whole process rather than just its linguistic components and awareness of how this develops within informal and formal learning situations cultivated. It points to a greater emphasis on human development and a clearer understanding of the shift between home and school/college communication to achieve better performances. A model for this is the *Communication Opportunity Group Strategy* (COGS), developed to target narrative thinking and language structures (Sage, 2000). With writing tasks matching speaking levels in the framework and its suitability for small or large groups, COGS participants have control over content to assist academic improvements. It follows principles that have proved their worth and has been the basis of work regarding intercultural communication practice across the world (Sage, 2000).

What does Intercultural Practice Mean

A recent book: “The World: A Family History”, is the epic journey of folk shaping the world: the Caesars, Medicis, Incas, Ottomans, Mughals, Bonapartes, Habsburgs, Zulus, Rothschilds, Rockefellers, Krupps, Churchills, Kennedys, Castros, Nehrus, Pahlavis, Kenyattas, Saudis, Kims and Assads (Montefiore, 2022). These actors, artists, charlatans, conquerors, doctors, gangsters, prophets, queens, scientists, teachers and tycoons span centuries, continents and cultures to link migration, religion, war, education and technology. A story of human joy, sorrow, romance, ingenuity, conflict and cruelty reveals human tensions are not aberrations but the norm, resulting from opposing cultural values and attitudes. They may be repelled and contained, defeated and replaced but their pull is humanity’s greatest force in plural societies. Only by understanding the permanence of culture, subjugation and violence can forces be checked, as fears created are weapons of war as well as political commodities.

a. Attempting a Definition

When teaching a Human Communication course, I would ask participants to describe “culture” and words produced were: *language, nationality, race, background, identity, origin, geography, religion, dress, food, music, dance, drama, art etc.* Emphasis was on things seen (*tangible aspects*) but the invisible beliefs, values and attitudes (*intangible aspects*) underpinning observable aspects indicate “culture” depth and difficulty.

Icebergs illustrate culture’s tangible and intangible nature, focusing on the tip – the top 10% - rather than the 90% below water (Hall, 1976). This means we seldom address the cultural issues and problems beneath the surface, so employing solutions blind to their complexity. Discussion often decides that culture is a monster too big to handle. It is certainly a monster on the prowl as cultural concerns chill and kill because of limited understanding of how to deal with them successfully. Cultural misunderstandings, if unaddressed, bring conflicts. Acknowledging these, with commitment to learning about them, is needed for successful performances. *Cultural intelligence* requires fostering at all educational/training levels, as portrayal as a monster is the result of comprehension issues. A definition must incorporate group values and beliefs, the learning occurring and expressions of

cultural norms. It conveys that culture has shared beliefs, values and assumptions, learnt from one another and taught to others that these perspectives, attitudes and actions are the right ways to think, feel and behave.

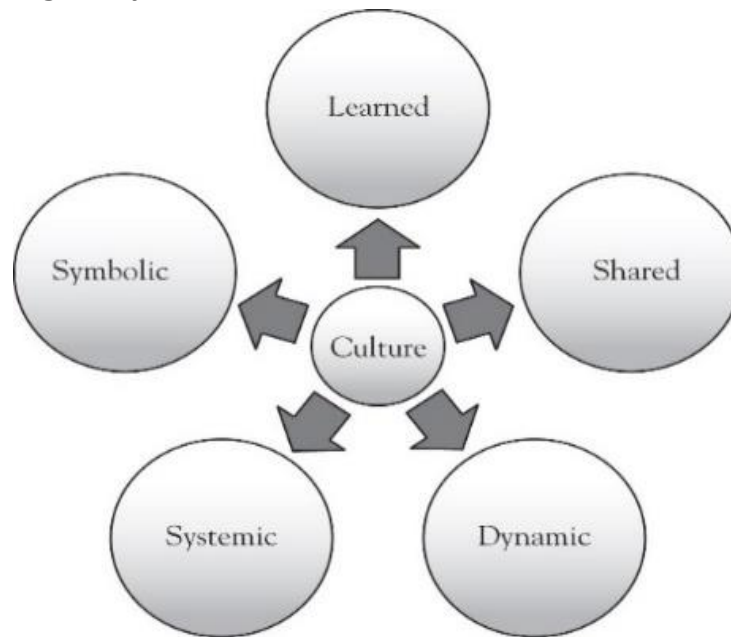


Figure 2. Cultural Elements

Thus, culture involves population beliefs, institutions and arts transmitted through generations. It is a society's life-style, with codes for manners, communication, dress, religion, rituals and artistry. The basics are *symbols, language, norms, values* and *artifacts*. As an uncountable noun "culture" or a countable one "culture/different cultures", layers of meaning and many components abound. Culture is the means of accumulation, assimilation, storage and transmission of experience, shaping individuals as they achieve knowledge and learn language to communicate symbols, values, thoughts and traditions.

The Importance of Intercultural Communication

Practitioners from academic research, scientific cooperation, business management, health, education, politics, diplomacy and development, etc. realise how important intercultural communication is for interaction. Rapid travel, the internet and international media make it easy for people to communicate world-wide. Economic globalisation means we are interdependent for products and services and must collaborate internationally for survival. The global nature of today's problems, like poverty, climate change, the eroding environment, international terrorism, brutal wars, Internet regulation and governance, demand cooperation. Thus, intercultural communication is not an option but an obligation.

Lack of knowledge about another culture leads to distressing mistakes - confusing or offending people needed to communicate with for business deals or international agreements. Well-publicised blunders have emerged. Pepsi Cola's "Come Alive with Pepsi" campaign, when translated into Taiwanese suggested "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave" to strike horror among the population. A

General Motors car advertisement “*Body by Fisher*” was “*Corpse by Fisher*” in Flemish. Since decisions affect citizens across nations, effective communication depends on having the same understanding. Language has the primary, instrumental job of transmitting information, but for people performs a social role, easing and harmonising their cooperative relationships.

Dealing with other cultures means increasing our performance by improving communication competencies. Gawande (2011) a surgeon, says around 50% of British patients receive inappropriate management because of scientific complexity and a struggle to process. Knowledge is not properly understood or correctly applied because academics, medics and patients fail to understand each other. Communication blunders account for £220 million medication claims alone over the last 15 years, estimated to have killed 22,000 UK patients annually. Pay-outs have doubled since 2014, indicating the importance of prioritising communication in education and training (NHS England, 2020). Misunderstandings in the 2020 pandemic rollout of changing information highlighted those not speaking English as their first language, so that miscommunications continually arose. When dealing with people from different cultures we must review our own communicative performance.

Cultural Differences

Looking for patterns helps to understand variances, producing advantages and disadvantages. It is useful analysis for cross-cultural encounters, but may ignore that within any ethos the sub-groups can have different behaviours to the norm. Thus, rigid categorisation may lead to false assumptions. Lewis (1993) divided cultural characteristics into 3 groups: ***linear active, multi-active and reactive***, suggesting that different nations exhibit these to varying degrees.

- ***Linear actives*** are: introvert, methodical planners, fixed-hour workers, rigid procedure followers with limited body language use.
- ***Multi-actives*** are: extrovert, grand design planners impatient about details, any-hour workers, multi-taskers, frequent interrupters interweaving the personal and professional.
- ***Reactives*** are: introvert, seeing the whole picture, planning slowly and using subtle body language.

Thus, individual personalities with different reactions are a cultural issue. Lewis sorts nations by determining which group these traits fall within. Germans and Swiss demonstrate the most linear active traits. Examples of multi-active characteristics are Africans, Arabs, Indians, Latin Americans and Pakistanis. Nations showing reactive traits are the Japanese and to a lesser extent Chinese.

1. High and Low Context

Cultures are commonly placed on a continuum from higher to low context (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (Sage et al., 2012). This analyses national negotiating styles regarding the importance which persons give to the cultural context in which they operate. For example, Arab culture is high context, as negotiators attach great importance to historical setting, making distinction between the way matters of state and commerce should be led. The first is principle and morals while the second is bargaining. Arabs prioritise negotiator bonds and trust, with respect for honour

and dignity (Cohen, 1997). Traditional and less developed societies tend to use a high context approach in dealings with others. British and Americans typify the low context approach of developed nations, viewing negotiations as collective problem-solving. Knowledge and expertise are applied to find mutually acceptable solutions to problems, with partners expected to give and take. Low context cultures subordinate history, personal honours and relationships for agreements.

However, cultural differences can lead to serious misunderstandings. Categorisation misses cultural variations resulting from different contexts. At times, UK or US negotiations are high context, communicated in nonverbal exchanges which participants in the culture recognise. This questions what contexts give rise to varying negotiating tactics. An analysis of the balance of resources between those involved helps to answer queries. Syrians dealing with British and Americans may take a high context approach but with Lebanese or Kurds use a low context one. Also, what is meant by "low context"? While Cohen and others suggest it is a way of perceiving the world not necessarily superior to others, little detail or facts are supplied in presentation. This use of language implies assumptions about what is important and how things work, thus focusing on the issue of linguistic ambiguity.

2. Ambiguity and Cultural Differences

Pehar (2011) suggested there is no significant difference between supposed low and high context cultures. Both types use confusing language with negotiating partners, measured by ambiguity use in peace agreements, with no significant difference between types. Both kinds employ unclear language to bridge the gap between negotiating groups, as in the Yalta Declaration drafted jointly by representatives of high and low context cultures. The Yalta Crimean Conference (coded Argonaut), held in February 1945, was the World War II meeting of government heads from the US, UK and Soviet Union, to discuss post-war reorganisation of Germany and Europe. It was held near Yalta, in Crimea, and aimed to shape peace with a collective security order and self-determination plan for re-establishing war-torn European nations. However, within years, the Cold War and cultural conflicts divided the continent, with declaration goals constantly debated. Thus, there is no direct, positive correlation between use of ambiguous provisions and culture types. Negotiators from different cultures rely on similar means to arrive at an agreement text, suggesting a common diplomatic philosophy. Linguists acknowledge that languages, reflecting distinct cultures, have scope for intended or unintended ambiguity. It is said that the Chinese use under-specification and ambiguity in interpersonal communications with the opposite true for the British and Americans. Thus, linguistic understanding differences in negotiations could confer an advantage on those employing ambiguities in agreement texts to serve their own purposes.

Alternative Groupings

Other groupings amongst cultures (Sage, 2004):

1. Masculine versus feminine approaches to interaction

Masculine cultures value achievement, assertiveness, heroics and material wealth. Feminine cultures value relationships, care of the less fortunate and life quality. Examples of masculine cultures are Slovakia, Japan, Hungary, Austria and Venezuela. Feminine cultures are Sweden, Norway, Netherlands and Denmark.

2. High versus low avoidance of uncertainty

Cultures needing certainty to feel secure are more likely to enforce rules for behaviour and develop formal or informal codes of conduct. *Italy, Korea, Mexico, Belgium, and Russia* show high uncertainty avoidance. Britain, the United States, India, China and Singapore show low avoidance of uncertainty.

3. Centralised versus decentralised power

Some cultures value equality and power distribution, while others expect a hierarchy where some have more control over others. The People's Republic of China, Denmark, France, Georgia, Indonesia and Spain exhibit centralised power. Switzerland and Iceland are the most decentralised nations with Japan following this principle since the start of 2000.

4. Individual versus collective achievement

Some cultures emphasise individualism and others the group good. People who live in individualist *cultures* tend to believe that independence, competition, and personal achievement are important. Countries considered individualistic cultures include the United States, Western Europe, South Africa and Australia. Collectivist cultures, like those of Asia, China, Korea, and Japan, emphasise family and work group goals above individual needs or desires.

Not all problems are cultural, but result from differing role and power status. It is vital to respect everyone in all situations and make adjustments to avoid offence. This suggests general guidelines, for bridging cultural gaps:

a. Knowledge is power

Research the culture you are dealing with presently. National Embassies provide advice for particular needs. When working on the Japan project, preparing citizens for the 21st century, the London Japanese Embassy gave valuable background to help communicate effectively with the education and health groups involved in the research. Prejudice results from ignorance and context information prevents wrong assumptions.

b. Accept differing cultural values

Consider other views and why they are held. This does not mean changing your ideals but accepting that those from other cultures may differ and must be taken into account within exchanges. Avoid negative remarks and resist believing your own culture has all the correct answers. Every culture has strengths as well as aspects that can be developed and improved.

c. Share relevant personal information

Asking and answering questions about oneself establishes the knowledge base for effective interpersonal relations. Open communication reduces uncertainty

and anxiety for relaxed dealings. Laughter helps to banish underlying fears of coping with the unknown.

d. Be flexible and aware

Our thoughts, words and actions connect, so it is vital to become aware of thinking, perceptions and assumptions. Monitor “*self-talk*” (inner-voice) - the way you self-communicate. You may be unaware of doing it, but it happens continuously! This inner voice combines conscious thoughts with ingrained beliefs and biases to create an internal monologue to influence all behaviour. Be mindful, active but not reactive. Observe others closely, especially their non-verbal responses, providing 93% of affective meaning, to help adjust your actions accordingly (Mehrabian, 1971). Willingness to adapt to circumstance is vital for successful exchanges. Coping with change is an essential competence in a world continually altering circumstances.

e. Deal with ambiguity

Communicating with persons from other cultures produces uncomfortable uncertainties, because of different customs and styles, so learn to tolerate them. Knowledge of other cultures and of those communicating are keys to this issue.

In summary, why has intercultural communication become so important recently? National differences seem more significant, high-lighted by social media. Diversity is obvious now that we operate globally. It enriches relationships, but globalisation produces more politics linked to culture and identity, adding to present management challenges because of numerous disagreements. The European Union is a political merger, but demonstrates greater diversity from recent, rapid people movements. Thus, people are less homogenous from their assorted, many influences. The lingua franca of the era, whether Latin, Italian, French or English historically, has always been steeped in the peculiarities of understanding and ways of seeing the world at that particular time. Literature down the ages clarifies that the direct correspondence between language and the reality it describes cannot be taken for granted.

People acquiring fluency in other languages do so with their own habits of thought and understanding, structured and maintained by their cultures and mother tongues. Connected in plural societies, people immersed in their backgrounds, cultures and languages, show the scale of problems for decision-making today, because of their differing values and attitudes. We must believe that some shared understanding is achievable. Life is an exercise in language and communication to create understanding in contested circumstances. When communication across languages and cultures takes place, the scope for misunderstanding increases, with arguments about words and meanings producing barriers in exchanges.

The importance of language and culture are the semantic distinctions reflecting varying interpretations of reality and behaviour. Words are key to different world ideas. A stick is an identifiable object at a non-linguistic level that can be cut, kicked or thrown, among other things. Once a word name is used, culture enters the scene, rooted in the history, religion, customs and context of meanings within the given linguistic community. A word evokes a unique range of references, associations and uses. It is polysemic – *the capacity for a sign (symbol, morpheme, word or phrase)* to have multiple related meanings and uses. Across languages, these

meanings occupy different semantic fields, although they may converge in usage. An example is the word “*peace*”, with legal examples in many languages. In English, this word refers to state treaties for purposes of harmony, but the Hebrew term, “*shalom*”, lacks the legal features that “*peace*” means in Europe, deriving from a Semitic root meaning *health, welfare, greetings and safety*. An Israeli might say “*all people returned safely*” with “*shalom*” - meaning safe and sound. Thus examining word meanings must be normal practice in intercultural exchanges.

Assisting communication among different national and professional cultures is challenging. You need to understand local cultural patterns in an assignment/project, in order to grasp and influence developments. Also, you must “*translate*” local cultural developments and present them in meaningful terms for judgements and decisions. Another transition is between professional cultures. As example, with environmental negotiations, expert language and logic require converting into words understandable to politicians and vice versa. This is often more difficult than communication between different nations, which was the role of the diplomatic class in the past but now is expected of us all.

We can review ideas of culture as:

- Communication - and communication as culture.
- Amassed individual/group knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, time concepts, roles, space relations, world ideas and possessions.
- Systems of knowledge shared by a group, with products as conditioning influences .
- Sum of a person's learned, accumulated social learning experiences – cultivated behavior.
- Way of group life - behaviours, beliefs, values and symbols that are accepted and transmitted through communication and imitation across generations.
- Symbolic communication, including a group abilities, knowledge, attitudes, values and motives. Meanings of symbols are learned and maintained in a society through its institutions.
- Explicit and implicit behaviour patterns acquired and transmitted by symbols, creating the unique achievement of human groups, including their artefacts.
- Traditional ideas and their attached values for group behaviour transmitted generationally.
- Collective mind programming distinguishing different group members.

Contact between nations has increased, as more take an interactive role in international affairs. Particular groups have become more aware of their identity and rights. In some countries, ethnic minorities have demanded the right to education, media and other services in their own languages, leading to armed conflict with national majorities, as seen with the Basque group in Spain. When chairing a PhD board, at a UK Russell group university, there was a strong move for students to produce research reports in their mother tongue. My view that English was the instructional medium and so should be the language for submissions was not popular with some members. Such situations have led to awareness of linguistic rights as human ones, causing limited resources to be distributed unfairly. As English has gained world currency as the common diplomatic language,

international organisations are recognising the various lingua of member states as official for both oral and written proceedings. In interactions, psycho-linguistic experts are urgently required to sort out the battles that now occur regarding communications between diverse people and their languages.

Conclusion

Conclusions that can be drawn from this paper is that we need to make communication a priority. Cross-cultural competence cannot be taken for granted as something mastered intuitively. Past Western world dominance and the homogenous nature of discourse between people have made specific education and training less necessary. The reality of today suggests otherwise. A rise of plural societies, with their many layers of diversity, demands extensive, explicit education and training in human communication. Theory must integrate with practical need and be adapted appropriately for a specific context. To achieve cultural intelligence and practical competence is not to abandon personal characteristics or adopt another style. The aim is to achieve insight to reduce cultural distance, indicating direct rather than indirect signalling when communicating with diverse audiences. Each language, reflecting a particular cultural philosophy, provides a different world outlook. Things said concisely in one tongue have laborious expression in another. Thus, vocabulary is vital to review and revise when preparing for intercultural exchanges. Some English words, like “fly”, have over 60 meanings to confuse, so along with tonal nuances and vocal dynamics produce differences of association and sense.

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