


INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines whether cultural differences have become barriers to communication in some situations and whether effective measures have been found to overcome the barriers. It also explores whether more appropriate measures can be adopted to enhance intercultural communication. A brief review of the literature on the studies of barriers to intercultural communication was conducted. A second review of the literature relating to solutions to barriers in intercultural communication and potential problems was carried out. The literature review indicates that many scholars emphasize the importance of being aware of cultural differences and have found measures to overcome the barriers to intercultural communication. The research suggests that more measures should be taken for effective and smooth communication across cultures.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Culture is a complex concept. There are various definitions of culture, ranging from broad to narrow. Moreover, the concept of culture changes as society develops. Presently, many definitions of culture indicate the close relationship between culture and communication. With the continuous development of society, communication between different nations becomes increasingly significant. It is a dynamic process characterized by continuous information exchange between people of different cultural backgrounds. However, different nations have different cultural practices in various aspects, such as politics, religion, economy, medicine, education, business, etc. During the process of communication, cultural diversity may become barriers to communication and may result in misunderstanding, embarrassment, or even conflicts among people with different cultures.

A lot of people and experts have become aware of the cultural diversity. They try to solve these problems by probing into barriers to intercultural communication and exploring effective ways of avoiding communication failure. Many scholars and researchers observe and conduct studies in the realm of verbal and nonverbal communication between different cultures. They will search for appropriate programs or measures to deal with cultural diversity.

#### Statement of Problem

The problem to be addressed in this paper is to identify whether cultural differences in some specific situations have become barriers to intercultural

communication and whether effective measures have been found in different fields. Another objective is to discover whether more appropriate measures can be adopted in many fields to overcome the barriers.

#### Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted in and through the Karrmann library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over ninety (90) days. Primary searches were conducted via the internet through EBSCO host with ERIC and Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included “culture,” “communication,” and “intercultural communication.”

#### Method of Approach

A brief review of literature on the studies of barriers to intercultural communication was conducted. A second review of literature relating to solutions to barriers in intercultural communication and potential intercultural communication problems was carried out. The findings were summarized and recommendations were made.

#### Definitions of Terms

**Culture.** “the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (Samovar, Porter, & Stefani, 2000, p. 36).

**Communication.** “the transfer or exchange of information between entities”  
(Khan, 2001, para. 1 ).

**Intercultural Communication.** “the symbolic exchange process whereby  
individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared  
meanings in an interactive situation” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 39).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Culture and communication

Culture is a complicated social phenomenon. With social development, the concept of culture is changing continuously. Communication, verbal or nonverbal, is always significant for people to transmit information. Culture and communication are inseparable. In other words, culture plays an important role in communication.

#### *Culture*

Culture, a rather evasive concept, is difficult to define. There are various definitions of culture, ranging from broad to narrow. As early as the 1950s, more than 160 different definitions of culture were available in the anthropology literature (Samovar, et al., 2000). Since then, new definitions have appeared in large numbers (Samovar, et al., 2000).

The definition of culture has changed over time. In its earliest uses, culture was “a noun of process, referring to the tending of crops or animals,” which had the meaning of cultivating that can be found in words such as “agriculture, horticulture and viviculture” (Bowe & Martin, 2007, p. 2). In the sixteenth century, culture began to refer to “cultivating the human body through training” and later meant “cultivating the non-physical aspects of a person” (Bowe & Martin, 2007, p. 2). In the nineteenth century, the meaning was developed further to contain “the general state of human intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic

development,” which is similar to “civilisation” and become more abstract (Bowe & Martin, 2007, p. 2).

Currently, many definitions of culture indicate the close relationship between culture and communication. Samovar et al. (2000) propose a definition that is concerned with the theme that culture is closely associated with communication. Samovar et al. (2000) define culture as “the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (p. 36). This wide definition embraces almost every aspect of human life. It expresses shared identity and common characteristics among group members. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) provide another definition, pointing out that “members within the same cultural community share a sense of traditions, worldviews, values, rhythms, and patterns of life” (p. 28).

### *Communication*

Communication is one of the basic needs of human beings. It is also difficult to find a single definition of communication. Khan (2001) defines it as “the transfer or exchange of information between entities” (para. 1). Khan emphasizes the importance of communication for human beings on the basis of an empirical study: a person who is isolated from any kind of communicative setting will have a nervous breakdown (2001).

There are two types of communication, verbal and nonverbal. Verbal communication is achieved via language. According to Samovar et al. (2000), “Language is a set of symbols and the rules for combining those symbols that are used and understood by a large community of people” (p. 122). They emphasize that language is of great importance to human communication because it provides a way for us to interact with the outside world. Nonverbal communication is “independent of a formal language” (Khan, 2001, para. 5). In other words, messages are transmitted in various ways rather than by words.

People usually express themselves through the combination of verbal and nonverbal messages. Besson et al. (2005) point out that information is always conveyed by verbal language and nonverbal behavior at the same time. Samovar et al. (2000) argue that we gain insight into the internal psychology of others via their nonverbal behavior instead of their words. Samovar et al. (2000) point out further that people are more willing to believe nonverbal messages when verbal and nonverbal messages are inconsistent.

With regard to the relationship between culture and communication, LeBaron (2003) argues that “All communication is cultural.” Samovar et al. (2000) state that “culture influences language by way of symbols and rules as well as our conceptions of the universe” (p. 123). Besson et al. (2005) point out that “Non-verbal action can be dynamic and spontaneous, but usually it is patterned by the respective culture” (p. 8). They all emphasize the close relationship between culture and communication. As a matter of fact, culture influences communication in various aspects.

### *Intercultural communication*

With the global integration accompanied by social development, international communication becomes more frequent, and understanding different cultures becomes more common. According to Samovar et al. (2000), intercultural interaction has become “axiomatic and pervasive” (p. 3) mainly due to the following three global developments: transportation systems and communication systems, rapid increase in the world’s population, and transformation in the international business field. Samovar et al. point out that intercultural encounters have never been so frequent under the present situation of global development (2000).

Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) define intercultural communication as “the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation” (p. 39). This definition includes some key components, implying a complex process of intercultural communication. In a speech delivered to the Canadian Public Relation Society, Scudder (2004) states that “Communication can be easy at play. It’s harder at work, especially when they are significant difference in culture, goals, and perspectives” (p. 559). During the process of intercultural communication, there are cultural similarities between different nations but in many cases there are cultural collisions (Gao, 2005). Gao (2005) mentions that the differences are reflected not only in different pronunciations, grammar structures, and choice of words, but also in cultural customs and modes of communication.

LeBaron (2003) states that the challenge we are facing is that distinctive cultural differences may cause misunderstanding or even conflict, even though we have a good intention during communication. If we know about differences between cultures, we will develop awareness that culture influences communication in a way and improve our communicative ability to avoid conflicts when encountering cultural differences (LeBaron, 2003).

Linguistic experts categorize communication failure into pragmatic failure and cultural failure and believe that the latter one is more severe (Gao, 2005). Wolfson states that when conversing with foreigners, native speakers often can tolerate pronunciation and grammar mistakes, but a violation of communicative rules may be considered impolite because they may not recognize different communicative rules between cultures (as cited in Gao, 2005).

Scudder (2004) mentions in his speech “Far too often a failure to communicate is the result of indifference and arrogance, a lack of respect for local culture” (p. 560). Many people find that understanding cultural differences is essential to smooth and effective intercultural communication. Many scholars have become aware that cultural diversity may give rise to barriers in intercultural communication. They analyze the reasons that cause cultural conflicts and try to find solutions to overcome them.

#### Barriers to intercultural communication

There are many examples to illustrate that cultural differences may become barriers to verbal and nonverbal communication respectively. However, in most

occasions, people are more likely to convey information via verbal and nonverbal means simultaneously.

### *Barriers to verbal communication*

Directness and indirectness, lack of equivalents, and differences even between native English speakers are factors that exemplify barriers in verbal communication.

### *Directness vs. indirectness*

Cultural difference can be reflected by the way people use language. Bowe and Martin (2007) analyze connection between directness and politeness in different social contexts. Some cultures favor directness to express politeness, while others favor indirectness. Bowe and Martin (2007) examine speech acts, such as “requests, complaints, apologies, acceptances of apologies and compliments” (p. 4) in terms of cultural preferences for directness or indirectness. For example, a person may give some hint if he/she wants to get someone’s help in one culture, whereas in another culture, making a request directly may be more appropriate (Bowe & Martin, 2007).

Samovar et al. (2000) state that “the use of direct and indirect language is a major linguistic difference between North Americans and many Asian cultures, such as the Chinese” (p. 129). As they explain, the Chinese are more likely to use a negative answer for a positive intention and a positive answer to mean negative, which is a “reflection of indirect approach to communication” (p. 129) to show respect toward others and their politeness. The North American can be confused by the “contrary-to-face-value” (p. 129) aspect of Asian euphemistic verbal

behavior (Samovar et al., 2000). For example, Chinese is used to “politely refusing an offer three times before they accept it” (p. 129) so that they can save face, but this will make many Chinese hungry at dinner table when Americans invite them to dinner (Samovar, et al., 2000).

### *Lack of equivalents*

Lack of equivalents can lead to breakdown in intercultural communication. As Samovar et al. (2000) note, “Many words are culture-bound and have no direct equivalents” (p. 132). Translators may come across many difficulties when translating one language into another. Samovar et al. (2000) give one example: when “a tribe in a mountainous jungle region” familiar with the vocabulary for “rivers and streams” (p. 134), but does not have the word for oceans. How can a translator find the equivalent for “ocean?” There are many similar difficulties originated from lack of equivalents between different cultures.

### *Difference between native English speakers*

It is evident to see distinctive cultural patterns in different languages. However, Samovar et al. (2000) state that even native English speakers use English differently “among various English-speaking cultures” (p. 130). They mention that British people usually use the phrase to express gratitude frequently before asking for a request, as in “I’d be awfully grateful if...” (p. 130). When British people do not agree with each other, they may start a sentence with words such as “I may be wrong, but...” (Samovar et al., 2000, p. 130). British people use the subtle and euphemistic speech to avoid confrontation, which is quite different from Americans (Samovar et al., 2000).

### *Barriers to nonverbal communication*

Many scholars and researchers show more interest in nonverbal communication between different cultures than verbal communication because they believe people express their attitude and intention more through nonverbal rather than verbal means. Gunawan (2002) mentions the findings of one study conducted in the United States: a person transmits up to 93 percent of a message via nonverbal behaviors and only 7 percent via language.

Gunawan (2002) points out that some non-verbal signs popular in one country may have no meanings or even completely opposite meanings in another country. Gunawan lists examples of specific nonverbal gestures which have similar and different meanings in the United States and Indonesia. For example, according to Gunawan (2002) in USA, the V sign with “the two fingers and the palm face out” means victory, but in Indonesia, it means number two “whether the palm faces towards the speaker or the palm faces out” (Non-Verbal Gestures section, para. 8). Samovar et al (2000) also mention that Americans use index finger to point at objects and people, but using index finger to point at people is considered impolite in many cultures of Asia.

LeBaron (2003) states that people in one culture have their unique ways to interpret nonverbal signs. People from different cultures may misunderstand each other if they are not familiar with the nonverbal signs in each other’s cultures. Many scholars and researchers are interested in the negative consequences of misunderstanding nonverbal behavior due to cultural differences. They observe, analyze, and summarize similarities and differences in nonverbal communication

between different cultures so as to achieve deep understanding of cultural differences, improve cross-cultural competence, and bridge the cultural gap.

### *Cultural influences*

People encounter cultural conflicts because of different cultural practices in various domains. It may become more complex when cultural conflicts become barriers in different contexts. The following section will examine cultural influences on domains such as business, food custom, medical care, and education.

#### *Business*

Many companies experience cultural conflicts when doing business on a global basis. For example, when a German company was bought by a global company with its headquarter in Oslo, Hydro, it encountered many cultural differences (Widlic, 2007). The employees of German company which had just been bought were not accustomed to the informality of the Norwegian writing style and also not accustomed to the flexibility that they didn't have before (Widlic, 2007). Widlic (2007) mentions that the colleagues of the German company comment "on the use of first name and of no titles, uncertainty about who was in charge, and who was responsible for what" (p. 14). The global company developed slowly because Germans were not used to the flexible way that Americans do business (Widlic, 2007). Cultural barriers in business may lead to failure in international business.

### *Food custom*

People in one culture have their own food custom, which may be very different from that of another culture. Rivas-McMillan (2007) describes an experience of a group of insurance sales agents who came from Trinidad and Tobago to Hong Kong and Thailand for sales travel. In order to know what to do and what not to do before the trip, they learned about the cultures in Hong Kong and Thailand, and they even got a booklet with important information about the countries that they were going to visit. When a British company offered them a dinner, they become embarrassed when “delightfully cooked pigeons were served with the heads as part of decoration” (p. 14). They ordered chicken instead, and they felt depressed when chicken also served with heads, so they got back to their hotel unhappily without dinner (Rivas-McMillan, 2007). This example shows that different dining customs may make two parties feel embarrassed and may even offend others.

### *Medical care*

Failure is commonly found in communication between patients and doctors from different cultural backgrounds. As Ashraf (1999) mentions, “Five patients’ advocates who specialized in women’s health and represented ethnic-minority groups in Hackney-including Somali, Vietnamese, and Punjabi people” (p. 910) pointed out the influence caused by the cultural differences between foreign patients and hospital staff. Ashraf (1999) lists several specific examples to illustrate the cultural differences in health care: A Sikh woman will be loaded with extra pressure because she may be accused of still-birth by her community,

and many patients in Vietnam may have adopted alternative therapies, such as herbal therapies, before they accept the treatment in hospital. Yeboah who was the patients' representative in West Africa "warned that traditional West-African beliefs sometimes conflicted with Western medicine" (as cited in Ashraf, 1999, p. 910). For instance, West-African women consider overweight as beautiful, it is hard for doctors to advise them on diet (Ashraf, 1999). Different beliefs between patients and doctors may cause severe consequences, especially for patients.

Doctors and minority patients often cannot communicate well because of cultural differences; as a result, minority patients may be negatively affected (Underwood & Adler, 2005). Underwood and Adler (2005) also list some cases of misunderstanding due to different beliefs: a patient might refuse chemotherapy because he believed that the "symptoms arose from sorcery or something you did in a previous life" (p. 68); Hmong were not willing to take the pills, so the doctor had to increase the dosage, causing the unexpected side effects; a daughter of a Hmong family suffered from epilepsy, but her parents diagnosed that as "the temporary disappearance of her soul out of her body" (p. 69) and refused to follow the doctor's orders and "left her in a persistent vegetative state" (p. 70). Owing to the fact that their belief was originated within their cultural background, they refused to listen to the doctor's advice and took some measures which did not benefit the disease they suffered from. The severe result was that the condition of the patient could not be improved. Grainger-Monsen believes that the result can "be attributed, in large part, to cultural differences and failures of

communication, which afflict minorities” (as cited in Underwood & Adler, 2005, p. 70).

### *Education*

Li and Holliday point out that if educators overlook intercultural variation in language learning and teaching, they will fail in teaching target learners, who may feel confused too (as cited in Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005). For example, Hu reports that when the methodology of communicative language teaching (CLT) was applied in the language classroom in China, it “failed to have the expected impact on ELT in China because assumptions underlying CLT conflict with the Chinese culture of learning” (as cited in Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005, p. 101).

Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) argues that one reason is that grammar occupies an important position in foreign language learning for Chinese teachers and students, and another reason is that teachers are the center of the class and students are reluctant to accept interactive activities such as group discussion and debate, which are helpful to language learning. Similar scenarios found in other countries, where pedagogic innovations resulted in failure, indicate that teaching approach which ignores “the students’ norms and expectations” may not be effective but problematic (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005, p. 100).

Cultural difference, in a broad sense, can be reflected not only in business, medical care, and education, but in many other domains. Cultural diversity will become barriers to communication and results in unexpected consequences. Can we ignore it, or should we search for appropriate solutions to it?

### Solutions to barriers in intercultural communication

McGehee (1991) argues that “much of our socialization process has been designed to make people become alike” (p. 3), but such socialization is unfair and hard to reach. People believe that we can try to like one another by accepting differences and appreciating similarities, but it is unnecessary for everyone to become alike by the elimination of the differences (McGehee, 1991). Many people have explored the methods of overcoming barriers to communication from their respective fields and have achieved effective results.

#### *Medical care*

Many solutions have been put forward to reduce intercultural communication barriers in medical care. In order to improve the communication between foreign patients and doctors, Hackney launched “patients’ advocacy projects” (p. 910) in which the major responsibility of the advocates was to “ensure that patients understand the treatment being offered” (p. 910), so they can make proper choices together (Ashraf, 1999). Five patients’ advocates emphasized that doctors should understand more about the cultural and religious backgrounds among woman patients (Ashraf, 1999). They suggest increasing mutual understanding between patients and doctors and doctors’ respect toward patients’ cultural norms when miscommunication between foreign patients and hospital staff arises. Underwood and Adler (2005) point out that “physicians increasingly realize that, simple human dignity aside, respecting patients’ cultural beliefs can avoid tragedies” (p.72).

Competent interactive ability across cultures is also required for medical professionals to deal with cultural problems in addition to their sensitivity to cultural diversity (Samovar et al., 2000). For instance, when a Mexican baby who gets a serious disease needs emergent treatment, its parents usually adopt folk method to treat the disease (Samovar et al., 2000). Under this circumstance, medical professional should know about the patient cultural belief and informs the severe effect of folk remedies to the parents (Samovar et al., 2000). Medical professionals need communicative strategies to convince the parents to accept proper treatment while showing respect to their belief (Samovar et al., 2000).

These suggestions may help doctors better understand the problem arising from a patient's unique cultural background, so that they can diagnose illness precisely, find causes of disease, provide appropriate treatments, and cure disease as early as possible. Satisfactory results may thus be accomplished.

### *Business*

Brown (1995) mentions that many U.S. enterprises do not attach importance to cultural nuances when doing business in African-American market. Many leaders realize that cultural differences affect a company's success in the global market. Kim L. Hunter started Lagrant Communication in 1990 which is a "full-service public relations firm" (p. 40) in Los Angeles, California to help large companies understand the African-American consumer market (Brown, 1995). Widlic (2007) suggests that "communicating these cultural differences to both sides, across the broad scale and not just at the top, would have saved time, reduced worries and improved understanding" (p. 14).

Frauenheim (2005) points out that “As the world gets smaller, understanding country-specific differences becomes a business” (p. 1). Training programs were financed by U.S.-based global business such as Intel to “help employees better comprehend their international co-workers and customers” (Frauenheim, 2005, p. 2). In 2004, in order to better understand Intel’s corporate culture and different cultures around the globe, “a new leadership program for midlevel managers” (p. 1) was created by Intel, which cost the company a large amount of money (Frauenheim, 2005). “People who are responsible for hundreds of millions of Intel’s wealth and prosperity need to be able to understand how to work well on a global basis,” says Kevin Gazzara who led the development of the new leadership program spanned the globe (as cited in Frauenheim, 2005, p. 1).

Frauenheim (2005) further points out that Intel was not the only business emphasizing the importance of addressing cultural differences in recent years. Other businesses such as Software firm, KLA-Tencor, a high-tech manufacturer based in San Jose, California took similar measures to help employees adapt to workplace cultures in foreign countries (Frauenheim, 2005).

Large international firms have many solutions to cope with the challenges of working in the global marketplace. The measures taken by large international firms may bring about more effective teamwork and innovative thinking and finally result in economic benefits to their business. With establishment of more businesses on a global scale, for the purpose of improving management, expanding the international market, and increasing sale, perhaps other training programs and measures are needed to address cultural differences.

*Education*

Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) outlines a framework which incorporated the sociocultural backgrounds of target learner groups into methodology courses for TESOL teachers to develop their sociocultural awareness. Specifically, Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) raises four main categorized questions supplemented by related questions in the framework for teacher trainees to “investigate discourse patterns across cultures,” “analyze the assumptions underlying various methodologies, and evaluate their appropriateness for target learner groups” (p. 102). This can raise teachers’ awareness of sociocultural diversity and facilitate them to choose the suitable teaching methodology for target learners of various cultures and subcultures (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005). Educators can find out appropriate “materials and pedagogical approaches for particular contexts of teaching” (p. 100) after considering sociocultural backgrounds of learners when they design courses and implement lessons (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005).

Many people work hard to overcome barriers on the basis of respecting each other’s differences. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) point out that “An intercultural conflict episode often involves complex, multilayered factors” (p. 260). Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) present some research findings about conflict styles in diverse cultural and ethnic groups. Scholars focus on analyzing different communication styles and factors that cause intercultural conflicts in order to understand deeply about barriers to intercultural communication and ultimately improve communication between cultures.

### Potential problems in intercultural communication

When people know more about cultural diversity, they can communicate with people from another culture more easily (Encina, 2007). However, potential problems arise in intercultural communication.

One common problem is stereotype. El-Dash and Busnardo mention that “any categorization of a group results in some level of stereotyping” (as cited in Bowe & Martin, 2007, p. 5). Bowe and Martin (2007) state that if people think that individuals in one culture share same characteristics, “such categorizations may lead to some level of overgeneralisation” (p. 5). In the field of education, as Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) mentions, comparing learning styles across different cultures “can perpetuate differences, promote the concepts of otherness, and lead to simple dichotomies and stereotyping” (p. 104). Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) emphasizes that in order to overcome the problem of stereotyping, teachers should take multiple factors into account when comparing similarities and differences among students, such as “individual variation, as well as the dynamic nature of (sub) cultures” (p. 104). Bowe and Martin (2007) point out that “no individual member of a group is the embodiment of his or her group’s characteristics.” In order to learn about characteristics of an individual in one culture, we need to consider other related factors. Otherwise, we may misunderstand him or her.

Another problem is that there are many factors which may influence findings from studies on different cultures. In studying cultural differences between different groups, we need to generalize, but if we take action based on some generalizations, especially when our conclusions are not based on scientific

observation, serious negative consequences may occur (Encina, 2007). Encina (2007) conducted a study on people from different cultural backgrounds through interviews and pointed out that “Cross-cultural observations can easily be tainted and contaminated by other factors” (Cross-cultural and status barriers section, para. 8). Status difference is one of these factors that can be misinterpreted as cultural difference (Encina, 2007). For example, a black African accountant makes little eye contact when faced with a white manager, but he makes plenty of eye contact and is full of creative ideas when the manager is absent (Encina, 2007). If we do not take many factors into consideration in our study of cultural differences, the findings may mislead others in intercultural communication.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the review of relevant literature, this research paper shows the close relationship between culture and communication and indicates the importance of intercultural communication in the current world. The paper illustrates that cultural differences, both verbal and nonverbal, becomes barriers to communication. It also examines barriers to intercultural communication in different domains and various solutions to the barriers in corresponding domains. However, more effective measures need to be explored in order to improve communication between cultures. Below are some further measures that could be taken.

First, more programs about intercultural communication can be created. For example, in order to enhance the intercultural communicative competence of oversea students, technicians, or managers who work abroad, immigrants, and ambassadors, many nations have provided training programs about intercultural communication. Intercultural courses are designed to teach strategies of coping with intercultural incompatibility or conflicts in higher education. Administrators and educators have the responsibility to help students gain a sense of their unique culture and tradition, and understand and respect other cultures. Some organizations or institutions may be established to design some programs consisting of lectures, seminars, discussions, conflict resolution training programs or other innovative activities regarding intercultural communication.

Second, various forms of intercultural training can be adopted. The initial stage of intercultural training is to provide background information by introducing one target nation's history and custom. In the following stage, some various activities may be conducted for trainees to participate in. For example, trainers can have trainees do role plays to let them experience the difficulties and problems in intercultural communication. Or they can provide opportunities for trainees to interact with representatives or experts from another culture. Having trainees conduct a case study is a popular way of training. In the case study, trainees are told about a cultural conflict accident and then they are offered several different explanations for the accident. Trainees choose one explanation and compare it with the correct one. During the process of analysis and discussion, trainees may gain the knowledge of target cultural customs and improve their communicative skills.

Third, teachers should help students develop comprehensive intercultural communicative ability. In foreign language teaching, the ultimate goal is to help learners communicate successfully. Teachers should not only teach foreign language rules but also communicative rules of a foreign culture, both verbal and nonverbal. In other words, students should not only learn foreign language rules, but also develop their intercultural communication competence. Having students compare cultural similarities and differences between the target and native country will enable students to learn how to interact appropriately with people from the target country.

Fourth, educators and scholars do not require people to follow the way in another culture. During communicative process, people often give up their original ways and adopt their counterpart's means of communication in order to achieve harmony, but it is unnecessary to do so. One reason is that it is difficult to achieve. Usually people will appear funny when they want to act in conformity with native customs. Another reason is that the purpose is not to require one party to abandon their own customs and values, but require the two parties to understand and respect each other so that they can cooperate better.

Finally, equality between nations and races is a key element to positive international relations. People can avoid misunderstanding or conflict if they pay enough attention to cultural differences and make use of appropriate measures when communicating with people from another culture.

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