

UNRAVELING THE DYNAMICS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND ADAPTATION PROCESS IN MULTICULTURAL SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT. *The purpose of this article is to provide an explanation of the concept of intercultural communication and its nature while also identifying the crucial cultural adaptation process. The study used a qualitative literature search method to form and analyse the adaptation process in intercultural communication. Additionally, the article emphasises that culture shock plays a significant role in the dynamics of the adaptation process. Moreover, it points out that every individual faces distinct challenges during each phase of the adaptation process.*

Keywords: *Culture shock; Cultural adaptation; Intercultural communication; Adaptation process.*

MENGUNGKAP DINAMIKA KOMUNIKASI ANTARBUDAYA DAN PROSES ADAPTASI DALAM LINGKUNGAN MULTIKULTURAL

ABSTRAK. Tujuan artikel ini adalah untuk memberikan penjelasan tentang konsep komunikasi antarbudaya dan sifatnya sementara juga mengidentifikasi proses adaptasi budaya yang penting. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode pencarian literatur kualitatif untuk membentuk dan menganalisis proses adaptasi dalam komunikasi antarbudaya. Selain itu, artikel ini menekankan bahwa kejutan budaya memainkan peran penting dalam dinamika proses adaptasi. Selain itu, ini menunjukkan bahwa setiap individu menghadapi tantangan yang berbeda selama setiap fase proses adaptasi.

Kata kunci: Kejutan budaya; Adaptasi budaya; Komunikasi antar budaya; Proses adaptasi.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication refers to communication with cultural differences such as language, values, traditions, and habits (Mundeza, 2021). The beginning of intercultural communication will inevitably bring about cultural shocks. Culture shock is a psychological phenomenon commonly occurring when individuals move to a new cultural environment. It is characterised by disorientation, confusion, and anxiety arising from unfamiliar cultural practices, norms, and values. People may experience different symptoms of culture shock, such as homesickness, frustration, or even depression. This phenomenon can manifest in various ways, including difficulty adjusting to social customs, language barriers, and challenges adapting to new work or educational environments. In order to minimise the impact of culture shock, individuals must prepare themselves mentally and emotionally for the potential challenges associated with cultural adjustment. This can be achieved through learning about the culture, its customs, and its history and developing an open-minded attitude towards the new environment. By doing so, individuals can facilitate a smooth transition to a new cultural setting and even come to appreciate and enjoy the unique experiences and perspectives a new culture offers.

A Canadian anthropologist, Kalervo Oberg, coined the term *cultural shock* (Oberg, 1960). Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that

results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to give orders to helpers, how to make purchases, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not. These cues, which may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms, are acquired by all of us growing up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we do not carry on the level of conscious awareness. Based on the aforementioned perspective, it can be inferred that culture shock occurs when individuals are placed in a cultural milieu that is divergent from their own and necessitates them to acclimate to their novel surroundings. Culture shock as *social disorientation* (Daenekindt, 2016) is a common experience many people face when entering a new social environment. It is characterised by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about how to navigate the unfamiliar territory. This term is often used to describe the disorienting effects of joining a new culture, which could be a foreign nation, religious community, educational institution, work environment, or even a new family. When individuals are faced with new climates, locations, and customs unfamiliar to them, especially if they

have lived in one place for an extended period and have become accustomed to the local culture, they may be surprised and experience difficulty adjusting to the new environment. This could result in feelings of isolation, confusion, and frustration, which can be challenging to overcome. Therefore, it is essential to provide support and guidance to individuals who are experiencing social disorientation to help them navigate and adjust to their new environment.

One of the most apparent examples of culture shock is the diverse makeup of university students. With students coming from various locations, both near and far, as well as within and outside the region, each institution is a melting pot of cultures (Lam, 2017). As a result, students may experience difficulty adjusting, commonly known as the adaptation process or student adjustment problem. Adaptation refers to the effort one makes to acclimate to a new environment, including its cultural nuances and fellow students. When a student decides to leave their previous setting and enter a new one, they may encounter sociocultural challenges unique to their new surroundings. These challenges require solutions that can only be achieved through adaptation, which is undoubtedly different for each student (Shuang et al., 2014).

METHOD

This research used a qualitative method through the literature search conducted to identify scholarly articles, books, and research papers related to intercultural communication, culture shock, and the adaptation process. Databases such as ResearchGate and Google Scholar were used, and a combination of keywords was applied as search terms. The inclusion criteria for selecting literature focused on studies published in peer-reviewed journals, books, and reputable academic sources, with only literature addressing intercultural communication, culture shock, and adaptation considered. Information from the selected literature was systematically extracted, including key concepts, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and significant findings. Special attention was given to studies providing insights into the nature of intercultural communication, stages of culture shock, and factors influencing the adaptation process.

RESULTS AND FINDING

1. Understanding communication across cultures

The concept of intercultural communication has been defined in various ways by experts in the communication field. According to Samovar and Porter, intercultural communication occurs

when individuals from one culture engage with those from another. More specifically, it refers to the interaction between individuals whose cultural perspectives and symbol systems are notably distinct during a conversation. In simpler terms, intercultural communication involves sharing information between people of diverse cultural backgrounds, encompassing ethnicities, races, and socioeconomic classes (Dong et al., 2008). Intercultural communication pertains to exchanging information between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves the process of conveying and interpreting messages that are influenced by different cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Effective intercultural communication is essential in today's globalised business and academic settings, where diverse cultural perspectives and experiences are valued. It requires sensitivity, openness, and respect for cultural differences to ensure clear, concise, and accurate communication across cultural divides.

Intercultural communication is a dynamic process wherein language, values, traditions, and habits are conduits for revealing cultural differences (Liu et al., 2014). This exchange occurs between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, manifesting through specific communication channels and resulting in distinct outcomes. Building on this understanding, intercultural communication is a nuanced and multifaceted interplay that recognises and incorporates the cultural origins of the involved parties (Penbek et al., 2012; Samovar et al., 2014).

To illustrate the concept, consider a scenario where a Japanese business executive interacts with an American counterpart. Japan may have a cultural preference for indirect communication and a strong emphasis on politeness. In contrast, American communication styles might lean towards directness and assertiveness. This cultural variance could lead to potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations during their interaction. For example, the American executive might perceive the Japanese executive as vague or non-committal, while the Japanese executive may find the American's directness as brusque or impolite.

Intercultural communication is crucial in a globalised world for several reasons. Firstly, it fosters mutual understanding, breaking down barriers and cultivating empathy among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This understanding is vital for effective collaboration in various settings, such as international business negotiations, diplomacy, or multicultural workplaces. Furthermore, intercultural communication plays a pivotal role in preventing stereotypes and biases from overshadowing interactions. By recognising and appreciating cultural differences, individuals can navigate diverse

perspectives more adeptly, fostering an inclusive and harmonious environment.

In essence, the significance of intercultural communication lies in its ability to bridge cultural gaps, enhance cooperation, and promote a world where diverse perspectives are acknowledged and celebrated. Embracing intercultural communication is essential to building a global community that thrives on diversity and mutual respect.

2. Nature of Intercultural Communication

Throughout an individual's formative years, the norms of communication culture are acquired through social and educational processes and become ingrained in their personality and conduct. Enculturation is the process by which cultural patterns are implanted into the neural system, leading to the acquisition of communication habits (Valente, 2011). Acculturation, on the other hand, refers to the social process that occurs when people with a shared culture are exposed to elements of a foreign culture (Mundeza, 2021), which are gradually accepted and processed into the shared culture without destroying their personality. Cultural interaction or acculturation events often result in cultural changes and developments in the local community, which may create various good and bad issues (Van et al., 2013).

Deculturation is known to be one of the possible outcomes of acculturation. In acculturation, individuals may adopt another culture's customs, values, and beliefs, while deculturation refers to losing or abandoning one's cultural practices, norms, and traditions. This process may occur when individuals or groups experience a significant environmental change, such as migration to a new country, exposure to new cultural values, or adopting new technologies. Deculturation has been studied extensively in anthropology, sociology, and psychology, as it has important implications for understanding cultural diversity and identity formation.

Verbal communication involves external communication with others and internal communication within oneself, while nonverbal communication techniques include body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, and physical distance. The interpretation of nonverbal communication cues varies across cultural contexts, and a particular gesture or expression may have different meanings. Misunderstandings may occur because communication is often believed to be simple due to commonalities between all human beings (Mauranen, 2006).

In today's globalised world, intercultural interactions are increasingly common. However, it is essential to recognise that different cultures have unique modes of adapting to physical and

social requirements, as well as varying values, beliefs, and attitudes. Therefore, it is crucial to approach each intercultural interaction uniquely and determine the factors that influence the perception and communication meanings held by the cultural groups we interact with. This is because there is no reference point for this knowledge, and failure to recognise cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and even conflicts. To successfully navigate these interactions, we need to be aware of our own cultural biases and assumptions and be willing to learn about and adapt to the cultures of others. Intercultural communication can be a challenge due to differences in language use. Intercultural communication, a tapestry woven with diverse languages, values, traditions, and habits, encounters a formidable challenge due to differences in language use. This linguistic barrier poses a significant hurdle, often leading to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and a hindrance to effective cross-cultural dialogue.

By the way, we will delve into the explicit challenges posed by language disparities, provide illustrative examples, explore potential solutions, and examine how these challenges impact cultural adaptation, potentially resulting in culture shock. The crux of the challenge lies in the intricate nuances of language that can vary widely across cultures. Consider, for instance, the use of indirect language in Chinese communication, relying on contextual cues. An English speaker, accustomed to a more direct approach, might find this style perplexing, leading to confusion and potential misinterpretation. Similarly, idiomatic expressions, deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric, can confound individuals from other linguistic backgrounds, contributing to the complexity of intercultural communication. One concrete example is the Spanish expression "estar en las nubes," which translates to "to be in the clouds." While a Spanish speaker might employ this idiom to convey a state of distraction or daydreaming, an English speaker may struggle to grasp the intended meaning, exemplifying the challenges inherent in linguistic differences.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Active listening and the promotion of open communication are paramount. Encouraging individuals to seek clarification and fostering an environment where questions are welcomed can mitigate the risk of misunderstandings. Additionally, recognising and appreciating the diversity in non-verbal cues, including gestures and body language, is crucial. Training programs and cultural awareness workshops can equip individuals with the tools to navigate these nuances successfully. The impact of linguistic disparities extends beyond the realm of communication, seeping into the

fabric of cultural adaptation. The language barrier is a significant contributor to culture shock, a phenomenon experienced when individuals confront a new cultural environment. As language becomes a stumbling block, adapting to a new cultural milieu becomes a Herculean task, potentially leading to feelings of isolation, frustration, and disorientation.

Language classes tailored to specific cultural contexts become essential to counteract these challenges and facilitate cultural adaptation. Providing individuals with the opportunity to learn the language of their new environment empowers them to bridge the communication gap effectively. Furthermore, cross-cultural training that delves into the intricacies of language use can enhance cultural awareness, preparing individuals for nuanced communication and mitigating the impact of culture shock. When a person is learning a new language, they may focus solely on the literal meaning of a word or phrase and disregard its connotation or context. This can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications. Additionally, people from diverse cultures have different sensory experiences, meaning they see, hear, and feel things differently based on what they consider significant. This can further complicate communication. Stereotypes can also play a role in obstructing communication. They develop due to being firmly established as myths or facts in one's society and sometimes serve to justify biases. Stereotypes can distort an objective assessment of a stimulus, making it challenging to have productive conversations. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of these potential barriers to effective intercultural communication and work towards overcoming them.

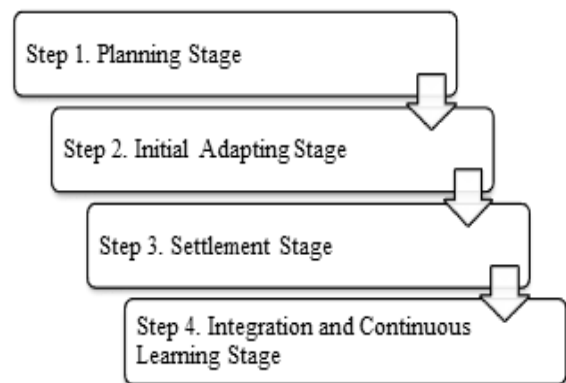
Another hindrance to understanding people from different cultures is the tendency to evaluate, accept, or reject the words (Mundeza, 2021) and behaviours of other individuals or groups before comprehending the ideas and emotions expressed by them. Intercultural communication refers to exchanging information between people from different cultural backgrounds. It is a complex and challenging process that requires a high level of skill and competence. Individuals who are skilled in intercultural communication possess the ability to overcome various difficulties that arise due to cultural differences, such as concerns or anxieties, while interacting with people from diverse cultures. This includes being aware of cultural norms and values, understanding the nuances of language and communication styles, and being able to adapt to different social contexts. Effective intercultural communication can help build trust, respect, and understanding among people from different cultures and is essential in today's globalised world, where individuals from diverse backgrounds often come together for work, education, and other purposes.

3. Process of cultural adaptation

Adapting to different cultures is crucial. It requires individuals to develop an understanding of the customs, values, and beliefs of other communities. This process enables individuals to communicate effectively and build positive relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, adaptation to culture is essential for success in international business, as it facilitates cross-cultural collaboration and helps avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. Therefore, individuals must acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to different cultures, which would not only enhance their personal growth but also contribute to the success of their organisations.

The term adaptation refers to the process of adjusting oneself according to the surrounding environment, particularly its cultural norms and practices. Cultural adaptation is a lengthy process of becoming used to and eventually comfortable in a new environment (Wang, 2006). When a person is uprooted from their home, taken away from the familiar environment they grew up in, and forced to adapt to new behaviours, they may struggle to learn new ways of living. This is especially true when they are removed from their comfort zone for an extended period (Mundeza, 2021), such as when attending college, which can lead to a cultural adaptation of values. Moreover, individuals who find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings are required to overcome a variety of challenges in order to function effectively. Consequently, acclimation involves encountering stress, adapting to new circumstances, and developing new coping strategies.

The cultural adaptation process consists of four distinct phases and a planning phase (Mundeza, 2021). As a result, the structured approach to cultural adaptation, which is delineated into planning, initial adapting, settlement, and continuous learning stages, provides a clearer understanding of the intricate journey individuals undertake when navigating a new cultural environment.



(Source: Author)

Figure 1. Process of cultural adaptation

Step 1. Planning Stage: Individuals enter the planning stage before transitioning to a new cultural environment. This phase unfolds in their original setting, where they proactively prepare themselves physically and mentally for the upcoming transition. Key aspects include honing communication abilities crucial for navigating the intricacies of the new culture.

Step 2. Initial Adapting Stage: Upon arrival in the new environment, individuals enter the initial adapting stage. They may grapple with feelings of alienation, homesickness, and solitude. However, the warmth and friendliness of the locals play a pivotal role in easing this transition. Enthusiasm and curiosity characterise this phase initially, but as reality sets in, a shift occurs.

- a. *Transition Challenges:* Individuals may encounter challenges as expectations clash with reality, leading to frustration, irritation, and a sense of powerlessness.
- b. *Readjustment Stage:* Recognizing the need for change, individuals enter the readjustment stage. This phase involves devising new strategies to adapt effectively to the current situation and addressing the issues that surfaced during the frustrating phase.
- c. *Coping Strategies:* During readjustment, individuals implement coping strategies to overcome challenges, fostering a renewed sense of adaptability.

Step 3. Settlement Stage: The culmination of the cultural adaptation process is the settlement stage. Here, individuals undergo a comprehensive readjustment process, mastering the local language and culture to integrate seamlessly into their new surroundings.

- a. *Language Mastery:* Efforts are directed towards mastering the local language, breaking down communication barriers and facilitating more profound engagement with the community.
- b. *Cultural Integration:* Integral to the settlement stage is the assimilation of cultural nuances. Individuals actively participate in local customs, traditions, and social norms, solidifying their sense of belonging.

Step 4. Integration and Continuous Learning Stage: As individuals settle into their new cultural environment, the process does not conclude but enters a phase of ongoing integration and continuous learning. This involves consistently adapting to evolving cultural dynamics, maintaining an open mindset, and fostering connections within the community.

4. Factors of culture shock-related

This part explores the various factors of culture shock influencing individuals' adaptation to

a new environment, encompassing social, cultural, technological, geographical, and linguistic dimensions.

First, culture shock is a complex aspect of the adaptation process that can significantly impact an individual's communication and behaviour. Experiencing cultural differences can evoke feelings of discomfort, leading to poor engagement and communication. The term "culture shock" is typically used to describe the experience of adapting to a foreign culture, whether it be a different country, religion, educational institution, job environment, or extended family through marriage. Interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds can often lead to dissatisfaction, as individuals may struggle with the unfamiliarity of their new cultural surroundings. (Cushner & Brislin, 1995). The experience of culture shock can be unique to each individual and may vary in its manifestation across different periods.

Besides, the experience of culture shock is a widely recognised phenomenon that arises when individuals relocate to a cultural setting that is markedly different from their own (Kim, 2005; Ward et al., 2001). It is an attempt to adjust to a new environment that can often result in emotional and psychological reactions as individuals navigate the new culture's unfamiliar customs, norms, and values. Culture shock occurs when an individual experiences discomfort and uncertainty in social interactions due to a lack of familiarity with the signals and symbols of a new culture. Culture shock arises when perceptions collide, as the individual's internal variables (cultural values) clash with unfamiliar cultural values in a new context (Morris et al., 2015). Furnham and Bochner describe culture shock as the inability to identify and conform to new social and cultural norms in the new environment.

The process of adjusting to a new culture can be a daunting task, especially when it comes to technology. The constantly evolving nature of technology can make it difficult for newcomers to keep up with the latest advancements, leading to anxiety and uncertainty. However, in order to succeed in a new environment, it is essential that we approach technological advancements with a critical mindset. By doing so, we can better understand their potential impact on our daily lives and find ways to integrate them into our routines. This not only helps us stay up-to-date with the latest trends but also enables us to navigate cultural differences more effectively and connect with others in our new surroundings.

Geographical variables, encompassing an area's weather and regional geography, such as coastal or mountainous regions, can affect a person's health. Language is a reflection of a civilised culture, and those experiencing culture shock when relocating

to a new area often cite language as a significant concern - especially if they come from a place with a lower economic level (Pasztor & Bak, 2019). Moving to a new location can be quite challenging for individuals, especially when adapting to a new environment and culture. It is common for people to work hard to increase their income in order to accommodate the cost of living in their new location. However, adjusting to new traditions can be daunting for newcomers, who often experience culture shock due to the difference in customs and social norms. In addition, religion can also pose a significant barrier to acclimating to a new location, as some individuals may have strong reservations about particular religious beliefs that are difficult to reconcile with their values and beliefs. Overcoming these challenges requires patience, understanding, and an open-minded approach towards new experiences and perspectives.

CONCLUSION

During their stay in a foreign country or a new cultural environment, people may face a range of unique challenges that impact their adaptation process. These challenges include language barriers, unfamiliar foods, safety concerns, geographic differences, colonial-style living, high costs of living, and homesickness. These factors can contribute to culture shock among some person, making their adjustment to the new environment problematic. However, as they progress through the four stages of cultural adaptation, they develop coping strategies to confront and overcome these challenges. It is important to note that the acclimation phases are closely linked to the difficulties that originate within the individual, such as a quiet or timid personality that hinders communication and fosters homesickness and fear of meeting new people. Additionally, some challenges arise from the environment, such as language and cultural differences that can be difficult to navigate, hindering some people from fully adopting the host culture. Despite these challenges, people who are able to adapt to their new cultural surroundings successfully often report a range of benefits, including increased self-confidence, improved language skills, and a better understanding of different cultures.

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