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Students' Perceptions of Intercultural Communication Competence: an Applied Study on the University of Sharjah

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the perception of UoS students of intercultural communication from the perspective of three fundamental elements: personal attitude, communication skills and psychological adjustment. The 'intercultural communication competence' variable was chosen in view of its significance in the current era and its gradual becoming a must-have for any individual wants to be an effective member in the local and global communities. A set of 10 intensive interviews were conducted, seeking in-depth thoughts, opinions and statements. The interviews were conducted with University of Sharjah students aged between 18 and 24 from different majors and cultural backgrounds. The study found that students realize the importance of the three elements in developing intercultural communication competence, but they expressed the need to better improve their ICC which is not easy. Most of them recognize the role of each element in building such a competence.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Communication Competence, Personal Attitude, Communication Skills, Psychological Adjustment.

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1. Statement of Problem:

According to Özdemir (2011), intercultural communication means communication between members of different cultures and sub-cultures. Intercultural communication includes interacting of individuals having different cultures, sending messages to each other and meaning these messages. Based on that, being interculturally competent refers to the ability of communicating effectively in such type of interaction. Because of the importance of such a competency, this research aims to examine students' perceptions of the fundamental elements of intercultural interaction, while giving an approximate evaluation for themselves. This kind of research is important to measure students' awareness of this kind of significant competencies that they must have in order to function effectively in the increasingly evolving, globalized society.

2. Literature Review:

2.1. Culture, Interculturality & Intercultural Communication:

Intercultural communication is a complicated phenomenon that is not easy to be studied, yet it should be given enough attention due to globalization in all life aspects. It could be defined as the interaction of two or more parties with different cultural backgrounds, however, this definition is too simplistic. According to Martin and Nakayama, intercultural communication needs to be examined through four building blocks to, at least, give an adequate overview of the nature of this phenomenon, which are culture, communication, context and power (Martin & Nakayama, 2014).

First, culture is defined as the "shared, learned behavior which is transmitted from one generation to another for purposes of promoting individual and social survival, adaptation, and growth and development" (Marsella 1994; here quoted from Samovar & Porter 2004). Second, communication was defined as "a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people create shared meanings" in order to help in achieving intercultural competence when interacting interculturally (Lustig & Koester, 2003).

The moment individuals cross the borders and start interacting with people from other cultures, they start developing interculturality through establishing constructive relationships with others. Interculturality refers to the process where people with different cultural identities and backgrounds relate to each other trying to harmonize the relationship (Dai & Chen, 2015). Dai and

The significance of interculturality to intercultural communication lies in four main aspects. The first is that interculturality penetrates cultural boundaries and facilitates intercultural interactions. Second, interculturality broadens interactants' perceptions and enhances their intercultural understanding (Dai & Chen, 2015). Interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds creates balance and complementarity in a relationship and exposes individuals to intriguing, new experiences (Lustig & Koester, 2003). In contrast to what many theorists believed, Havril argued that cultural diversity cannot always be experienced positively and productively (Havril, 2015). Third, interculturality reduces conflicts and promotes the development of harmonious relationships. Finally, interculturality promotes cultural creativity in intercultural interactions (Dai & Chen, 2015). Each culture expresses creativity in different domains using different ways to distinguish itself from other cultures (Runco, 2014).

Interculturality consists of both the dynamic process of cultural interaction and desired outcome of intercultural encounters. Therefore, intercultural communication competence (ICC) is perceived as the ability to establish harmonious intercultural relationships characterized by reciprocity and mutuality (Dai & Chen, 2015).

2.2. Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC):

In order for a person to succeed internationally, he/she should adapt to a new culture by acquiring intercultural communication competence. Competence is not an individual attribute, rather, it is a characteristic of the connection between individuals. So, it is possible for a person to be highly competent in a set of intercultural interactions, while incompetent in another set (Lustig and Koester, 2003). Plenty of researches were done in the field of intercultural communication and intercultural competency,

however, there is no consensus about what precisely being "interculturally competent" means (Dai & Chen, 2015). Although some specific personal attributes allow a person to be more or less interculturally competent, there is no prescriptive set of personal qualities and characteristics that grants intercultural competence in all situations and relationships (Lustig and Koester, 2003). Focus has been always on acquiring cultural knowledge rather than the dynamics of cultural interactions and this process leads to ICC development (Dai & Chen, 2015). Some researchers proposed a definition for ICC, such as Trans, who defined it as "the ability which enables one to effectively and appropriately interact in a language other than one's native language with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It consists of language competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence) and intercultural competence (attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness) that help one to be able to successfully integrate in a multicultural society" (Trans, 2015, p. 30).

ICC was approached by many scholars from different perspectives and there is a general agreement that ICC consists of affective, cognitive, behavioral and moral components (Bennett in Barker, 2016; Dai & Chen, 2015). The affective component of ICC refers to the emotional and sensational qualities (Dai & Chen, 2015). Human emotional reactions and responses include both feelings and intentions (Lustig & Koester, 2003). The affective component captures the ability and willingness to respect, empathize and respond to the aesthetic and emotional experiences of foreign cultures (Barker, 2016). Motivational forces that encourage people to acquire cultural knowledge and skills for the purpose of building intercultural relationships in harmony (Chen in Dai & Chen, 2015).

The cognitive component of ICC implies the development of intercultural awareness and knowledge, in addition to the assimilation of others' cultural contexts (Dai & Chen, 2015). The cognitive component emphasizes the ability of communicators to accurately perceive and interpret verbal and non-verbal environment cues using an acquired knowledge of the other culture, such as values, beliefs, norms and social standards (Barker, 2016). This knowledge involves both culture-general and culture-specific. The general knowledge gives an individual a broad insight of intercultural

communication process, while the specific knowledge provides information about a certain culture maintaining its uniqueness (Lustig & Koester, 2003). It is the process of utilizing culturally-different others' beliefs and values to learn about their way of thinking (Chen in Dai & Chen, 2015).

The behavioral component of ICC refers to the practical skills of intercultural communication (Dai & Chen, 2015). This is the actual performance of appropriate and effective actions (Lustig & Koester, 2003). It measures the ability of an individual to put his/her cultural knowledge into practice in order for the intercultural effectiveness to be achieved in the space of interculturality (Chen in Dai & Chen, 2015). The behavioral component is, simply, the fact that an individual is able to function in a new cultural context (Barker, 2016). The moral dimension of ICC refers to the ethical principles of intercultural interactions, including the basic norms, values and rules that regulate an intercultural interaction (Dai & Chen, 2015). In an intercultural interaction, the more differences we have, the more important is the moral obligation (Casmir in Dai & Chen, 2015).

Intercultural competence requires behaviors that are both appropriate and effective (Chen, 1989; Lustig & Koester, 2003; Barker, 2016). Appropriate means that behaviors should be socially proper and accepted by the host cultural context, while effective means these behaviors support the achievement of desired outcomes regarding the intercultural interaction (Lustig & Koester, 2003). Based on the idea that communication competence includes both effectiveness and appropriateness in an interaction, Chen (1989) has synthesized the literature of intercultural communication competence into four main dimensions, which are personal attributes, communication skills, psychological adjustment and cultural awareness. First, personal attributes refer to the fact that competent intercultural communicator must know themselves well using their abilities of self-awareness and self-disclosure. Sadovnikova found that adolescents, who have secure attachments to their parents, develop a higher self-esteem, thus, use more effective communication strategies with their colleagues and friends (Sadovnikova, 2016).

Second, communication skills refer to the necessity of possessing verbal and non-verbal behavior in order to be competent. These behaviors should

include message skills, flexibility, interaction management and social skills (Chen, 1989). Martin and Nakayama emphasized the importance of language skills in intercultural interactions (Martin & Nakayama, 2014). Smith has found that possessing more than one language is correlated with one's intercultural communication competence, but she noted that bilingualism is also correlated with enhanced cognitive abilities such as attention control, grasping abstract concepts, and metalinguistic awareness, so bilingualism is not the only influencing factor (Smith, 2016). The fact that language and ICC are connected is supported by Byram's model of intercultural competence (1997).

Psychological adjustment implies the ability of an individual to acclimate and adapt to a new environment (Chen, 1989). Living abroad can result in eliminating prejudices and stereotypes or, in contrast, can lead to new biases, negative perceptions and unfavorable associations about other cultures (Kasravi in AKSOY, UZUNOĞLU & AKYAR, 2017). Kim's "Integrative Communication Theory" posits that whenever an individual experiences a new cultural environment, he/she has nothing to do except to assimilate and conform through "unlearning" who they were originally (Pitts, 2009, 2016). Finally, cultural awareness refers to the acquisition of cultural knowledge by understanding the cultural map which consists of social systems, social norms and social values (Chen, 1989). Intercultural awareness is the willingness and ability to realize the need adapt and implement social changes within an intercultural context and it is necessary to achieve competence in intercultural encounters (Zhang & Steele, 2012).

2.2.1. Personal Attitude and ICC:

In this research, personal attitude refers to one's attitude towards both oneself and others. Attitude towards oneself leads to the concept of self-concept, that is defined as "a person's perception …. Formed through experience …and influenced…by environmental reinforcements and significant others" (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976, p.411).

Both researchers and clinicians in the field of psychology view positive self-concept as a desirable trait (Marsh and Craven 2006). There is general agreement that there is a correlation between self-esteem and various social and emotional difficulties (Owens and Stryker 2001). Moreover, social

comparison describes the process by which people compare themselves with others (Festinger 1954). Festinger's social comparison theory proposed that people should compare 'upwards' to others, thus comparing oneself with someone who is perceived as 'better' to some extent (Jackson et al., 2014).

From a cultural psychology perspective, the impact of culture on emerging individual selves can be significant (Winchester, 2009). Accordingly, as the sociocultural context changes, so does the 'self' expressed in interpersonal encounter (Suszek et al., 2009). 'The sociocultural contexts people are embedded within provide them with the materials of identity construction. People then seek to create selves that are relevant and appropriate to the characteristics valued in these social contexts' (Oyserman and Markus 1993, p.192). It is held that individuals highlight their cultural identities in intercultural interactions (Winchester 2007).

2.2.2. Communication Skills and ICC:

Communication is everywhere; in the market, in business, in casual settings, at restaurants, with your kids and even with yourself. "Your communication technique is your indisputable calling card. It instantly establishes who you are, how you feel, and what you expect from yourself and others" (Samata, 2012). Communication skills involve language, nonverbal cues and soft skills.

Language is an essential ingredient of communication skills. Acquiring foreign languages enhances one's ability to communicate effectively with others. However, if people with foreign language training but little experience begin speaking or writing in that language, the difficulties they encounter may pose a threat to their positive self-evaluation (Hines & Barraclough, 1995).

Frank and Shaw (2016) identified nonverbal communication as "signs, signals, and symbols; they include both the voluntary and involuntary quality of these actions". Nonverbal actions can serve many functions, from expressing message content to commenting on messages, to expressing emotion, to regulating interactions, as have appeared in many of the previous sections (Soukup, 2019).

2.2.3. Psychological Adjustment and ICC:

Psychological adjustment is an ability that allows an individual to communicate effectively with people from different culture, thus, develop ICC. Psychological adjustment shapes the way people acculturate (Birman, 2011), or adapt to new cultures. Psychological adjustment is mostly required when moving to new environments, however, we also need it in intercultural interactions, on a smaller scale, in order to achieve positive outcomes out of the interaction (Salo & Birman, 2015).

3. Theoretical Framework:

Deardroff's (2006) pyramid, research-based model of intercultural competence is one of the well-known frameworks that investigated the process of acquiring ICC. Basically, Deardroff pointed out that the degree of intercultural competence depends on some underlying components (Szőke, 2018). First, attitudes lie at the bottom of the pyramid in which they are the start point of building up intercultural competence. Then, skills and knowledge are acquired at the same level. After that, internal outcomes are achieved, such as adaptation to a new environment and being more flexible. At the highest level of the pyramid lies the external outcomes, by which we become able to communicate effectively with people from different cultures and performing effectively and appropriately in intercultural interactions.

Deardroff (2006) modified his model to be the Process Model of Intercultural Competence. Similar to the old one, the modified model emphasized the role of attitude, skills and knowledge in developing intercultural competence. However, the modified model implies that acquiring IC is an ongoing, positive, lifelong and developmental process (Harvil, 2015). This model explains the way the three elements, attitude, skills and knowledge, lead directly to the external outcome, but the level of effectiveness and appropriateness may not be as high as when the entire process is accomplished (Ibid in Tran & Seepho, 2006). The elements of the Process Model of Intercultural Competence will be used to measure the ICC of the UoS students. The same elements, attitude, skills and knowledge, were also discussed in Chen's (1989) synthesis, alongside psychological adjustment.

Employing the Process Model of IC, while referring to Chen's synthesis, this research uses some of these variables to measure the ICC of college students. Most other models and theories suggest relatively similar elements necessary to the development of ICC. However, this model organized these elements in an effective manner, producing implicitly a developmental process that guides people into the acquirement of ICC. Only attitudes and skills, from Deardroff's model, will be measured, while ignoring the knowledge element and adding the psychological adjustment element form Chen's synthesis. The knowledge element is deleted because the aim of the study is not to examine people's receptivity to a certain culture, but to investigate how these three elements influence people's ability to engage in intercultural interactions. In addition to that, attitudes, from Deardroff's model, and personal attributes, from Chen's synthesis, will be combined under personal attitude, in order to measure one's attitude towards oneself and others as well.

4. Research Questions:

RQ: How do UoS students perceive intercultural communication competence based on personal attitudes, communication skills and psychological adjustment?

5. Method:

This study aims to measure the ICC of UoS students using the three basic elements discussed in Deardroff's model and Chen's synthesis, personal attitudes, communication skills and psychological adjustment. Personal attributes refer to the self-concept, or how students view themselves, that influences how someone interacts with others especially "different" others from various backgrounds. Communication skills refers to the set of abilities that qualify an individual to communicate effectively with others, whether they are different on not. Psychological adjustment refers to the ability of an individual to adapt to new environments and whether they can develop relationships with others.

A set of in-depth interviews is conducted on 10 UoS students to measure these three fundamental variables. With its qualitative nature, interviews yield some thoughts, statements, opinions and beliefs that help to examine the existence of each of the three variables. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), the greatest advantage of in-depth interviews is the wealth of details. In their book, they also mentioned that the rapport established between the interviewer and the respondent allows for the discussion of sensitive or taboo issues (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). In this case, intensive interviews give a space to students to express themselves and evaluate their ICC in a credible manner.

The study population involves only undergraduates from the University of Sharjah. The sample is conveniently selected for interviews, although gender was controlled as a variable, in which the two genders were exactly equal in the sample, in order to eliminate any possible, major gender biases. The sample is comprised of 10 students. The interviews are semi-structured, starting with some demographic questions are asked at the beginning, then, three sets of questions are asked in a raw, in which each set examines one of the three basic variables of the study.

Participants were five females (50%) and five males (50%) aged from 18 to 24. They are all UoS students, but from different majors and different cultural backgrounds. The anonymity of participants' real identities was ensured as the questions discussed sensitive issues related to self-concept and psychological adjustment. Anonymity also guarantees sincere answers and genuine opinions. Therefore, all participants were given fake names in this research. An overview of the participants involved in the study can be seen in the table below.

Fake (Name)	Age	Nationality	Major
Reem	18	Egyptian	Medicine
Maha	19	Emirati	Graphic Design
Mohammed	20	Palestinian	Engineering
Laith	20	Lebanese	Chemistry

Faris	20	Jordanian	Business
Laila	21	Palestinian	Engineering
Juan	22	Chinese	International Relations
Ahmad	22	Egyptian	Pharmacy
Rahnoma	22	Nigeria	Mass Communication
Hadi	24	Syrian	Biotechnology

6. Results:

It was found that the students interviewed are, to some extent, interculturally competent and are also aware of the important of such competency. As expected, students who raised originally from diverse environments were more able to understand the issue of intercultural communication.

6.1 Personal Attitudes:

First of all, I had a short conversation with the interviewees about how they perceive themselves and how they evaluate their worth. I also discussed issues of social comparison and self-evaluation in the context of home, university and friendship. One of them only expressed superiority over others, three of them confessed that they feel inferior to others, while the rest evaluated themselves as regular and equal to others. People are different when it comes to the criteria by which they evaluate themselves. On the one hand, Juan stated "when evaluating myself, I first consider my academic achievements……being a smart person leads to self-satisfaction". Reem also supported this claim by saying "academic achievement yields respect and pride, even if friends, for example, betrayed you, you can easily move on as you already know that you are intrinsically strong". On the other hand, Laila claimed that "your relationships with others shape the person you are and whenever you are with the right people, you will always be confident, strong and satisfied". "People around us are very important when it comes to evaluating myself. I personally think that there are circles of proximity for people in our life. For example, parents are in the closest

circle, where they influence our self-esteem as they play the main role in building up our personality. Then, comes our teachers, friends and relatives, who can have positive or negative effect. At the outer circle, we find others with whom we do not interact much" said Mohammed.

The way individuals' perception of others is shaped differ from one person to another. Maha claimed that "the way we view others depend mainly on how parents nurtured and socialized us. So, whenever your parents taught you to respect people and accept the way they are, you become a tolerant person who is able to accept others and thoroughly interact with them". In contrast, Rahnoma stated "parents do have a significant role, but I think this role is limited to the earlier years of one's life. Many people we meet on a daily basis have good parents whom they did not learn much from. Friends have an influential role; however, I would also highlight the role of social media that is affecting the way we view ourselves and others as well".

After this short chat, students were asked about the importance of attitude toward oneself and others to be interculturally competent. Six of them expressed that you should just develop your perception of others just the same way you do with people from your cultural group. They also said that your self-concept will only affect you at the first place, not them. While four of them confirmed the need to have a positive self-concept and perception of others in order to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds

For instance, Maha expressed that "we should have a positive, or at least neutral, perception of others and be open to them in order for us to effectively sustain in an intercultural encounter……Sometimes, we fail to develop a relationship with someone good from another culture just because we have a "dump" stereotype in mind about them! This is absolutely unfair". Ahmad also added to this by saying that "sometimes we are very confident, but suddenly when we meet someone from another culture, especially if he/she from a country, perceived to be superior, our confidence shakes and we start questioning our actions. The only positive self-concept that sustains is the one that is embedded, adaptive and flexible".

In contrary, Laith claimed that "your self-concept whether positive or not affects only you whether in intercultural interactions or regular ones. If you are confident, you will always be confident and vice versa". Faris added to this saying "When I develop a perception of someone, I do not consider his/her culture because I think that personality is more important and worth taking into account, not culture".

6.2 Communication Skills:

The second part of the interview was about communication skills and how they affect intercultural communication competence. All of the interviewees agreed upon the fact that possessing good communication skills allows the individual to develop intercultural communication competence. They all added that we need communication skills for all types of interactions, but four of them stressed on the need for outstanding communication skills in intercultural encounters. As Hadi stated "communication skills are essential for any type of interaction. Without this type of skills, we become silent. The skills we need, include a good choice and use of words, organization of ideas, fluency in language and a neat flow of ideas". Adding to that, Faris said "humans are communicative creatures, so we need to know how to communicate effectively in order to achieve desired outcomes. For example, you need to know how to communicate well with your professor in order to pass the course!".

While others like Juan claimed that "we need to have super communication skills in order to effectively communicate with others from different cultures. Cultural differences in terms of communication are too many. Language at the first place comprise the biggest challenge, in addition to all cultural variations that might dilute any interaction at any second. Therefore, in order to be an interculturally competent person, I think a person should have a sophisticated set of communication skills that are not regular". In line with Juan's statement, Reem confirmed the need for excellent communication skills to "ace" intercultural interactions, adding that "One day, I met a classmate who was from Ghana and we had a short chat after class. What I noticed is that although we both speak English fluently, we were very cautious in the interaction. I tried to be clear as much as I can in order to avoid any misunderstandings. The most prominent

issue, I think, was the fact that I was not myself and I did not have much freedom. I basically tried just to talk about uncontroversial, general issues that anyone would talk about".

6.3 Psychological Adjustment:

The last part of the interview was imaginative. This phase aimed to approximately measure the students' level of psychological adjustment, then a short conversation took place about the importance of psychological adjustment and its impact on intercultural communication competence. A hypothetical situation was described for all interviewee:

"Imagine that you just moved to a completely new environment where you do not know anyone and you are forced to stay there for a while due to some reasons, such as education or immigration"

In a hypothesized sense, interviewees are asked to first describe their feelings, relationships and overall actions and reactions. All of them, except for two, thought that it would be difficult and they will not feel well, especially at the beginning. Some of them added that they will absolutely adapt after a while, but they need some time.

The two students, who are Juan and Laila, who expressed that moving to a new environment will not be challenging. Juan explained that she is originally Chinese who moved to three completely different countries throughout her life due to the work circumstances of her father. She said "I have been to the United States, Germany and Saudi Arabia. These countries have totally different cultures, social systems, values and various sets of accepted practices. Every time, I had to adapt and live up with these differences, otherwise, I stay at home doing nothing. I preferred to meet people, learn, discover and experience diversity. Although I went through difficulties and bad experiences, but I was encouraged by my parents who wanted me to be the person who stands any change to be much stronger. Therefore, I think I am able to live in any type of environment and I exactly know how to curb negative feelings and boost positive ones". Laila is another case of a third culture kid who moved to different countries, so she thinks that she is able to psychologically adjust to new environments easily. She stated "In order for you to develop psychological adjustment, you need

to experience a situation where you extremely need it and you do not find it, then you will gradually develop it yourself".

The rest of students claimed that that situation will be difficult. Their answers could be classified into emotions, physical status and relationships. All of them expressed that they will be nervous and anxious, may be with some fear of the environment and people. "I will be lonely…mmm and may be depressed" said Reem. "At the beginning, I will not be able communicate well and I will feel alerted and restrained all the time and may be scared as if I am in danger" said Maha. In terms of physical status, Ahmad claimed that "my stomach will absolutely hurt and I might suffer from migraine". Hadi added "I think my appetite will not be good". Laith, Faris and Mohammed described their relationships in such a strange environment, saying that they will be very limited. Laith said "If I find Arabs, I will be the happiest on Earth and I will start making friends". While, Faris stated "I will be afraid of discrimination, so I will try to keep my relationships minimal at the beginning to avoid any embarrassments, but I will start having short chats with others in order to get rid of the feeling of awkwardness. I always need to remind myself that they are friendly and humans just like us!". "I will not force myself to build relationships, however, I already know that I will need to communicate with others and relationships will be developed gradually later on" said Mohammed.

6.3.1 Importance and Impact of Psychological Adjustment:

The second request in this phase of the interview was to answer the two questions of "Do you think that psychological adjustment is important to developing ICC?" and "How does psychological adjustment affect ICC?".

For the first question, all interviewees confirmed the importance of psychological adjustment in the process of developing intercultural communication competence, however, some of them noted that this element is only needed when moving to a new environment because whenever you live in a country, your home or not, you get used to it unconsciously, especially if you are young. The other question raised various opinions from the interviewees. Ahmad claimed "whenever you are able to psychologically adjust, you are able to interact effectively

with people from different cultures, even if you are not moving to another environment". Laila added "psychological adjustment is an indicator of the readiness of an individual to engage in an intercultural encounter, where he/she can manage the interaction easily and smoothly". "A person who is unable to psychologically adjust, he/she is not interculturally competent. It is as simple as that!" said Juan. Reem finalized "the nedd for psychological adjustment is not limited to moving to new environments, I think that intercultural encounters are minimized versions of new places. Whenever you speak to a completely different person, he/she takes you to another world where everything is different and the only way to survive is to adapt. So, intercultural interactions are a good practice for us to enhance our psychological adjustment".

7. Discussion:

Throughout the interviews, many new ideas and issues are raised trying to answer questions. Three fundamental elements were discussed in the interviews, which are personal attitudes, communication skills and psychological adjustment.

According to Mount et al., 2005, personality has a role in determining emotional, behavioral and cognitive dimensions of individuals, and (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008) culture has a significant influence over personality. Therefore, an individual should possess cultural intelligence (Yeke & Semercioöz, 2016), that requires diversities of individuals and adaptation to unfamiliar cultural environment (Deng and Gibson, 2008). Four of the interviewees confirmed the need for positive self-concept and perception of others in order to effectively get engaged in intercultural encounters. According to Yeke & Semercioöz (2016), personality traits strongly contribute to cultural intelligence and influence it. As Maha explained the need for openness, acceptance and positive perception to eliminate the effect of stereotypes, Ang et al., (2006) stated that open individuals "exactly" reflect cultural intelligence. Culturally intelligent people prefer a more process-oriented approach to problem –solving, utilizing contingent, situational, creative strategies that keep room for variations, rather than predetermined patterns and formulas in decision-making and interactions (Ang, 2011).

Trying to define intercultural communication competence, Yeke & Semerciöz (2016) pointed out to the understanding competence of attitudes and behaviors of individuals having unfamiliar cultures. In addition to all that, attitude towards oneself and others are interconnected as Bennett (1998) explained that understanding others' culture might increase our knowledge, but it does not necessarily generate intercultural competence, while understanding both one's own and others' culture is more likely to develop intercultural competence.

Culture is invisibly permeated in our daily life through the way of speaking, social behavior, etiquette and socializing (Erickson, 1997). We know when to speak, when not to, what to say, to whom, where and in what manner. All of that became habitual that we do not think about them or even realize their existence (Bennett, 1998). Thus, differences in culture yield differences in the process of communication. The four interviewees who highlighted the need for outstanding communication skills to effectively communicate in intercultural interactions were right. "Communication works better when the participants share more assumptions and knowledge about the world" (Scollon & Scollon, 200, p.21). This statement confirms the fact that communication is easier when interactants are similar. If two different people who might differ not only in culture but also in gender, education and ethnicity, each person will find it more difficult to draw inferences about what the other person means (Sun, 2013). Drawing back to the example provided by Reem about her interaction, for the first time, with a colleague from Ghana, we find Scollon & Scollon (2001) stating that we cannot be certain whether we can interpret other people's speech or behavior correctly, but we could definitely expect things to "go wrong" and hesitate to draw any negative conclusion about others' action.

Another issue highlighted by Juan and Hadi, who claimed that language proficiency is a necessary ingredient in any successful intercultural interaction. However, Dumitrescu (2013) found that language proficiency is needed, yet inadequate, in which it is part of the overall awareness of others' cultural patterns of thought and behavior. These patterns help in determining a culture-specific use of language that would boost the success of the intercultural interaction.

The last phase of the interview involved an imaginary situation where interviewees had to react to related to psychological adjustment to new environments. All of them except for two expressed the challenging situation they will experience and how difficult it will. They also described some emotional and physical symptoms they might suffer from such as depression, migraine, tension and anxiety. Juan and Laila were the two interviewees who claimed that they are able to psychologically adapt due to their life experiences in moving to different countries. For instance, Juan talked about her experience in facing cultural differences and stressed over the role of her parents as they were always supportive. Her claim is supported by Prilleltensky (2008) who highlighted the supportive role of the family for migrants' psychological adjustment and Hasse et al. (2019) also revealed that refugees accompanied by family members exhibit higher psychological adjustment than those living in Germany alone. Also, Faris mentioned discrimination as an obstacle that would slow down his psychological adjustment and Schmitt et al. (2014) highlighted the link between the two phenomena in his study.

All interviewees thought of psychological adjustment as an experience, nevertheless, Zhu (2019) found that cultural adaptability is a personality trait that is inherent in an individual, referring to his/her readiness, willingness and excitement in interacting with people from different cultures.

8. Limitations and Future Research:

This research faced a lot of obstacles. First of all, contacting interviewees and encouraging them to accept was very difficult. However, encouraging them to answer in detail was much more challenging. The issues discussed in the interviews were sensitive and I had to assure them that their identities will not be revealed and will be kept confidential alongside all information, opinions and statements provided. I had to give them some hints in order to for them to know exactly what to describe and elaborate on as the topic is very broad, complex and has a lot of dimensions, so I needed to make sure that they are focused on the topic itself.

Another issue was the lack of time. This research is done at the maximum level within time limits. However, it could be developed and enhanced to a more professional paper. The time was very limited and I think it partially affected the quality of the paper. Another challenge was the topic itself. The literature was rich and huge and if it was adequately read well, a better research perspective will emerge. This takes us back to the limitation of time.

Adding a quantitative method to the study would be highly valuable. For example, if a survey is employed, the quantification element of surveys will support the results of the interviews and provide some numerical evidence on a larger scale, giving the study a sense of external validity.

I also recommend expanding the elements examined in order to develop a wider view of the research. For example, we can add the dimension of cultural knowledge and awareness, that examines the degree to which people are aware of other cultures, especially that we live in the age of information and globalization.

9. Conclusion:

This research investigated the way students perceive ICC from the perspective of three basic elements. This kind of ability or competency is a must-have for each student who is, in three or four years, will be a member of the community's working force. They need to be fully equipped, not only in terms of knowledge, but also in communicating with others. Many people are scientifically intelligent, but socially failures. They need to be competitive when it comes to flexibility, adaptability and effectiveness. They also need to know how to yield the most positive outcomes possible out of any interaction they go through. The path of success is not easy and requires continuous development and unlimited acquirement of skills.

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دراسة مدركات الطلبة لكفاءة الاتصال عبر الثقافات: دراسة تطبيقية على جامعة الشارقة

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ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل وقياس مدركات طلبة جامعة الشارقة حول الاتصال بين الثقافات بما يشتمل عليه من ثلاث عناصر أساسية، هي: طبيعة توجه الفرد، ومهارات التواصل، والقدرة على التكيف النفسي. ولقد وقع اختيار الباحثة على متغير «كفاءة الاتصال بين الثقافات» من واقع أهميتها في العصر الحالي، والتي أصبحت ضرورة ملحة لكل فرد يسعى إلى أن يكون عضوًا فاعلا في مجتمعه المحلي والدولي. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة على إجراء (10) مقابلات متعمقة مع طلبة الجامعة بهدف التعرف الدقيق على آرائهم ومعتقدهم نحو كفاءة الاتصال بين الثقافات، أو قدرتهم على إدارة اتصال فعال مع ثقافات مختلفة. وقد شملت عينة الدراسة طلبة تتراوح أعمارهم بين (18) إلى (24) عامًا من تخصصات مختلفة وخلفيات ثقافية متنوعة. وقد أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى وضوح إدراك الطلبة للمكونات الأساسية في تحديد قدرتهم على الاتصال عبر ثقافات متعددة، بينما عبَّر الطلبة عن حاجتهم إلى تطوير مهارات الاتصال بين الثقافات المختلفة، وإنه ليس بالأمر الهين.

الكلمات الدالة: الاتصال عَبْر الثقافات، كفاءة الاتصال عَبْر الثقافات، توجه الفرد، مهارات التواصل، التكيف النفسي.

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