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A Study on the Perception of Cross-Cultural Communication among Graduate Students of RIE-NCERT Bhopal

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Abstract

The present study seeks to examine the understanding and competency of cross cultural communication among the graduate students of RIE- NCERT Bhopal. It is to be noted that in an increasingly globalized world, effective cross cultural communication has become crucial for growth in personal, academic and professional settings. The world is changing at a rapid pace; with the fast evolving world the strategies to adjust in it have also undergone a massive change. With rapid advancement in technology and bridging of geographical barriers the way we communicate with others has changed for the better. In this era of the 21st century, there is a growing demand to develop skills of communicating across geographical and cultural boundaries. Thus, it becomes pertinent for the youth of the era to develop certain life skills, cross cultural communication being one of them.

Through a combination of questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions and open ended reflections, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed. The findings of this study reveal the strengths and the areas that require focus and improvement. It also aims to highlight certain competencies where training and exposure is required so that students are better prepared to face diverse global interactions.

Index Terms- cross cultural communication, 21st century skills, NEP 2020

1. Background of the Study

In today's globalized world, cross cultural communication plays an important role in shaping the way we interact, maintain relations and collaborate across diverse settings. With an increasing rate of diminishing geographical boundaries and educational aspirations, it is common for individuals to interact in academic, professional and social settings. Moreover, it is seen that in order to enter the job market and educational environments, graduate students have to prepare themselves in advance to adjust to cross cultural settings.

As Hall (1976) aptly states, 'Culture is communication and communication is culture,' indicating the inseparable relationship between the two. Cross cultural communication is not merely the use of language to communicate; rather it involves varied aspects like identifying and understanding cultural norms, values and styles of communication. It also requires a thorough understanding of certain verbal and non verbal cues like body language, gestures, tone of voice which may vary across cultures. A very easy example to illustrate this is that a simple hand gesture or direct eye contact may be taken positively in one culture and may be disrespectful in another. If students are unaware of these differences and do not understand them well it may lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, which may give way to conflicts and hinder future directions and goals.

Regional Institute of Education (RIE) Bhopal, is a premiere constituent unit of NCERT which works in the field of teacher education, aims to develop prospective teachers in a holistic manner. The Institute caters to the Western part of the country and serves as a common base for students coming from different regions and languages to interact and develop mutual respect for languages and cultures. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) and the National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education (NCFSE) emphasize cross-cultural

communication as a vital skill for fostering global citizenship and cultural sensitivity. The NEP highlights the importance of multilingualism, experiential learning, and 21st-century skills like adaptability and collaboration to prepare students for effective engagement in a globalized world. Similarly, the NCFSE integrates cross-cultural perspectives through interdisciplinary approaches, promoting respect for diversity, tolerance, and inclusivity.

This study aims to assess the proficiency of graduate students of RIE- NCERT Bhopal in cross cultural communication. By employing both quantitative and qualitative tools it seeks to highlight how students perceive and engage in a cross cultural environment, like the one provided in the institute. It will also provide an understanding of the challenges and the strategies that can be employed to enhance this skill. Moreover, by recognizing these factors, it will give an opportunity to educators and institutions to design training programs, develop curriculum in order to equip students with the necessary skills to wade through the challenges and demands of the globalised world.

2. Review of related literature

Gudykunst & Kim (2003) in *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication* explore the process of adapting to new cultural environments and overcoming communication barriers. They provide a strong rationale for including cross-cultural communication in graduate education.

Byram (1997) in *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* discuss how education should develop students' ability to communicate effectively across cultures and support the need for structured modules and assessment tools in higher education.

In *Barriers in Intercultural Communication* Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2012 identify key barriers such as language differences, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and non-verbal misunderstandings.

Kim (2001) in *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation* discusses adaptation strategies for individuals in multicultural settings and supports the recommendation to enhance exposure through exchange programs.

Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ by Goleman, 1995; Earley & Ang, in *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures* show that individuals with higher emotional intelligence (EQ) are more effective in cross-cultural communication and suggests integrating EQ training within graduate programs.

Knight (2004) in *Internationalization remodeled* discusses how universities can embed global learning in their curriculum and aligns with the recommendation to integrate intercultural communication within academic programs.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the development of global competency and multilingual skills.

National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education (NCFSE) 2023 suggests incorporating intercultural understanding within curricula to prepare students for a diverse world.

3. Rationale of the Study

In today's world cross cultural communication has emerged as an essential skill for graduate students to adjust and adapt to diverse cultural settings in academic, professional and social environments. The study is also aligned with the recommendations of NEP 2020 and NCFSE which emphasize the development of global competency and understanding of cultures. The research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical implications so that graduate students become ready for the ever changing world around us.

4. Objectives of the Study:

1. To assess the perception of cross-cultural communication among graduate students at RIE- NCERT Bhopal.
2. To identify the challenges faced by students of RIE- NCERT Bhopal in cross-cultural communication.
3. To explore the strategies employed by students of RIE- NCERT Bhopal to overcome cultural barriers.
4. To provide recommendations for improving cross-cultural communication in educational settings.

5. Research Questions

1. What is the perception of cross-cultural communication among graduate students at RIE-NCERT Bhopal?
2. What are the challenges faced by students of RIE- NCERT Bhopal in cross-cultural communication?
3. What strategies are employed by students of RIE- NCERT Bhopal to overcome cultural barriers?

6. Methodology of the Study

6.1 Research design

The present study adopts a mixed-methods approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data. The quantitative data will provide statistical understanding of the perception of cross cultural communication among students and the qualitative data will delve into the experiences of the students related to the challenges faced by them and the strategies they adopt to overcome these barriers.

6.2 Sample

The sample consists of 40 graduate VII Semester students from the four year integrated B.A B.Ed programme offered by RIE-NCERT Bhopal who were selected through purposive sampling. The students come from diverse cultural, linguistic and regional backgrounds representing States of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Chattisgarh and Goa. They also speak different languages as their mother tongue.

6.3 Tools

- Questionnaire on a three- point scale developed by the researcher.
- Focus Group Discussion with students
- Observation schedule

6.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative Data: A questionnaire on three point scale (know well, somewhat know, don't know) was administered to assess the perception of students on cross cultural communication. The questionnaire contained items on awareness, understanding, adapting, confidence and mutual respect in cross cultural settings. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Qualitative Data: Focus Group Discussions were conducted with students to gain an understanding of their experiences, challenges and the strategies that they adopt in cross cultural settings. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes in the discussions and open-ended questions.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Quantitative Analysis

Data for this analysis was collected using a questionnaire with a three point scale (Know well, Somewhat Know and Don't know), enabling a deeper understanding of the respondents' view on various aspects of cross cultural communication. The results are presented in tabular form followed by a detailed analysis and interpretations of the findings. These results offer a comprehensive understanding of how students perceive the concept of cross cultural communication.

a. Awareness of Cross-cultural Communication

N= 40

Table 1- Awareness of Cross-cultural Communication among students

S.No.	Statement	Percentage of Responses		
		Know Well	Some-what Know	Don't Know
1.	Definition and concept clarity	84	10	06
2.	Significance in daily life and society	82	11	07
3.	Challenges in multicultural communication	86	12	02
4.	Impact of culture on communication styles	80	11	09
5.	Examples of cultural miscommunication	84	09	07

- Definition and Concept Clarity-** A high percentage 84% of students demonstrate a clear understanding of the definition and concept of cross-cultural communication. This indicates that most students are familiar with the foundational terminology and principles.
- Significance in Daily Life and Society-** About 82% of students recognize the relevance and importance of cross-cultural communication in everyday life and societal functioning. This suggests that they are aware of its practical applications in school, community, and global contexts.
- Challenges in Multicultural Communication-** A slightly higher percentage, 86% indicates strong awareness among students about the challenges faced in multicultural communication. This may include misunderstandings due to cultural differences in language, behavior, or assumptions.
- Impact of Culture on Communication Styles-** Approximately 80% of students understand how cultural background influences communication styles, such as tone, gestures, and levels of directness. This shows a solid awareness of how culture shapes interactions.
- Examples of Cultural Miscommunication**
Around 84% of students are able to identify or recall examples of miscommunication that occur due to cultural differences, showing that they can connect theory with real-world situations.

The above data reveals that students have strong theoretical awareness of various facets of cross-cultural communication. The highest awareness is shown in recognizing the challenges in multicultural communication, while slightly lower awareness is noted in understanding the impact of culture on communication styles. This suggests that students are well-equipped in theoretical knowledge but may need more practical exposure to reinforce and apply this understanding.

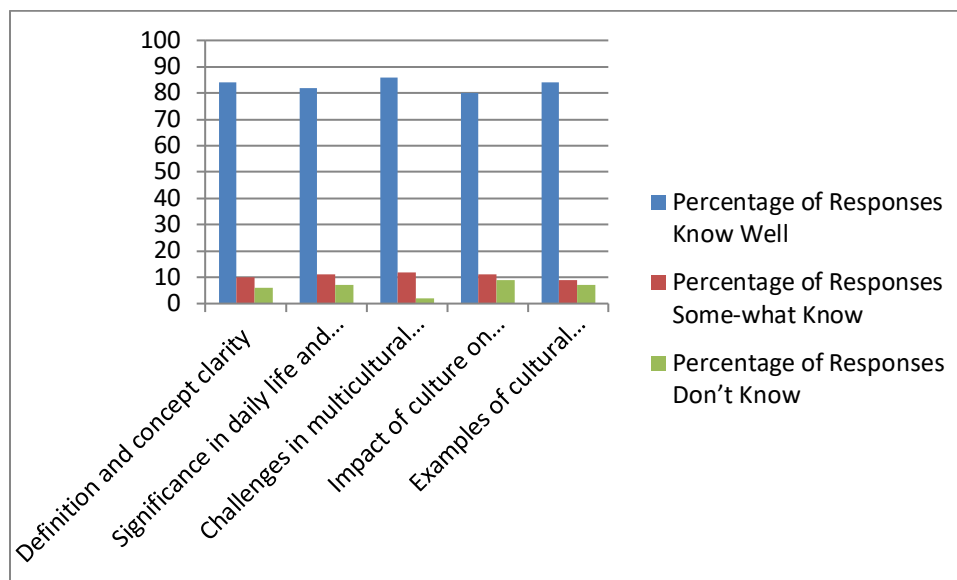


Figure 1- Percentage of Awareness of Cross-cultural Communication among students

b. Understanding of Differences amongst Cultures

N= 40

Table 2- Understanding of Differences Amongst Cultures

S.No.	Statement	Percentage of Responses		
		Know Well	Some-what Know	Don't Know
1.	Visible vs invisible culture	72	12	16
2.	Non Verbal Components of communication (eye contact, tone, etc.)	70	14	16
3.	Value systems across cultures	68	20	12
4.	Cultural stereotypes and generalizations	70	12	18
5.	Linguistic and etiquette sensitivity	72	10	18

1. **Visible vs invisible culture** - Around 72% of the students demonstrate awareness of the various models of culture and communication, thereby indicating a sturdy theoretical foundation of the theories linked to culture and communication.

2. **Non Verbal Components of communication**- 70% understand the importance of the non verbal component of language and say that elements like eye contact, tone, etc. affect communication.

3. **Value systems across cultures**- A slightly lower percentage **68%** understand value systems, indicating that more focused instruction may be needed on how beliefs like individualism or collectivism affect communication.

4. **Cultural stereotypes and generalizations**- Awareness of stereotypes and generalizations 70% is fairly balanced, showing that students can recognize bias but may not always critically challenge it.

5. **Linguistic and etiquette sensitivity**- A fair percentage of students, 70% understand that linguistic and etiquette sensitivity is important when communicating in a cross cultural environment, suggesting they are reasonably conscious of deep-rooted, invisible cultural components.

Overall, the above data reveals that students show a moderate level of understanding of cultural differences. While foundational understanding is present, students may benefit from case-based exposure and interactive learning to grasp more nuanced differences.

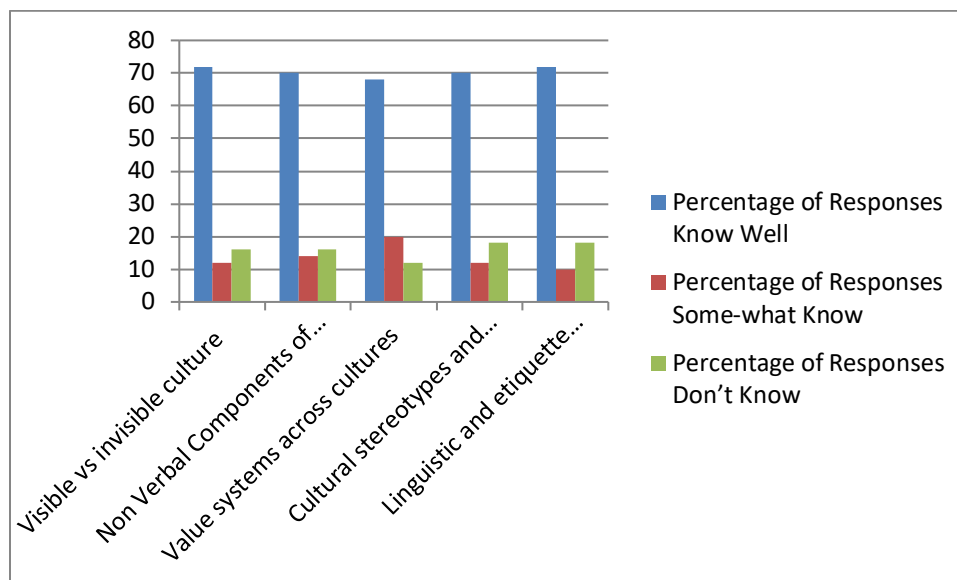


Figure 2- Percentage of Understanding of Differences Amongst Cultures

c. Adapting to Cross-Cultural Settings

N= 40

Table 3- Adapting to Cross-Cultural Settings

S.No.	Statement	Percentage of Responses		
		Know Well	Some-what Know	Don't Know
1.	Adjusting to verbal/non-verbal cues	58	30	12
2.	Behavioral modification in diverse settings	56	32	12
3.	Working with culturally diverse peers	54	30	16
4.	Handling misunderstandings calmly	58	22	20
5.	Using feedback to improve communication	56	28	16

- Adjusting to verbal/non-verbal cues**-Only 58% of the students are able to comprehend verbal and non verbal cues during communication, indicating a need for training on certain focused areas of communication.
- Behavioral modification in diverse settings**- Around 56% percent of students say that they are able to modify their behavior during diverse cultural settings, which indicates a less idea of cultural nuances and practices among students.
- Working with culturally diverse peers**-The lowest score, 54% indicates that students struggle when working in culturally diverse teams, possibly due to limited exposure or fear of making mistakes.
- Handling misunderstandings calmly**- 58% students are of the view that handling misunderstandings remains a challenging area, indicating a need for structured role-plays, simulations, and guided practice.
- Using feedback to improve communication**- a very less percentage, 56% of the students are able to comprehend the feedback during the communication process and modify their behavior accordingly.

These findings suggest that while theoretical knowledge is fairly established, practical adaptability is a weak area, requiring interventions like cultural immersion programs, peer collaborations, and guided feedback.

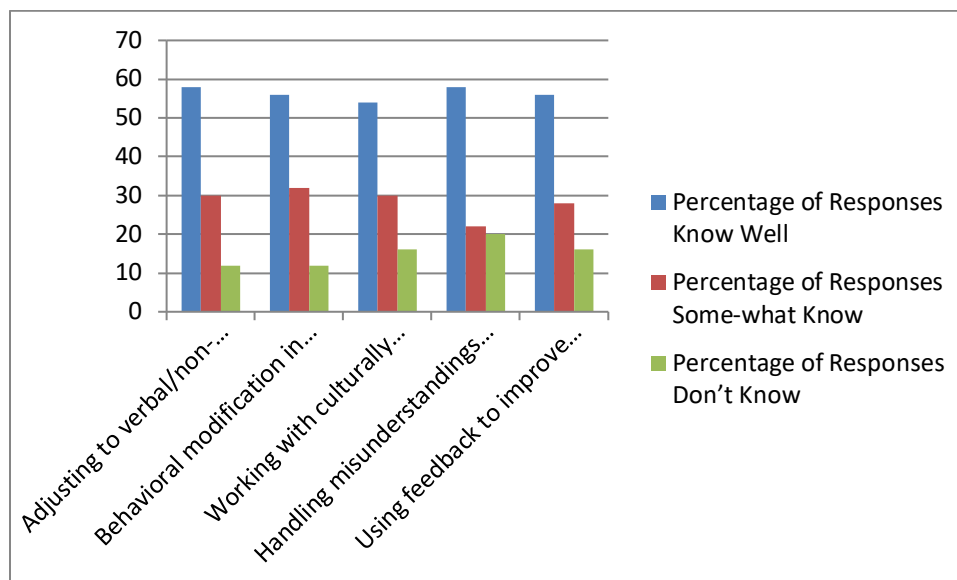


Figure 3- Percentage of Adapting to Cross-Cultural Settings

d. Confidence to Communicate Across Cultures

N= 40

Table 4- Confidence to Communicate Across Cultures

S.No.	Statement	Percentage of Responses		
		Know Well	Some-what Know	Don't Know
1.	Initiating cross-cultural conversations	66	24	20
2.	Clarifying cultural norms assertively	64	18	18
3.	Respectful expression of opinions	62	22	16
4.	Navigating unfamiliar communication contexts	68	20	12
5.	Resilience after communication failure	66	20	14

1. **Initiating Cross-Cultural Conversations-** A solid 66% of students report that they know well how to start conversations with people from different cultures. This indicates a high level of openness and initiative, suggesting that students are generally comfortable making the first move in intercultural settings.

2. **Clarifying Cultural Norms Assertively-** 64% of students feel they are capable of assertively asking questions or clarifying cultural practices without offending others. This is a good indicator of growing intercultural sensitivity combined with communication skills.

3. **Respectful Expression of Opinions-** 62% of students feel confident in sharing their views respectfully in cross-cultural contexts. This suggests that most students understand how to balance assertiveness with politeness, a key trait in effective intercultural dialogue.

4. **Navigating Unfamiliar Communication Contexts-** The highest score in this set, 68%, shows that students feel well-equipped to adjust to new or unfamiliar cultural settings. This points to a strong situational awareness and adaptability, which is promising for future global academic or work experiences.

5. **Resilience after Communication Failure-** Again, 66% of students report that they are able to recover from misunderstandings or failed interactions. This shows a commendable level of emotional maturity and self-regulation, key in maintaining long-term intercultural relationships.

The above data interpretation supports the need for practical, experiential, and feedback-rich learning environments to raise these confidence levels even further.

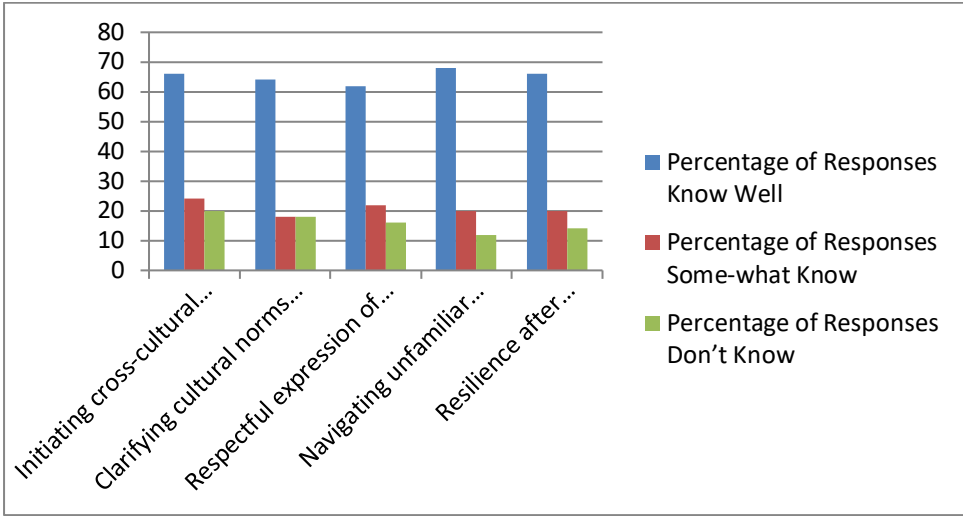


Figure 4- Percentage of Confidence to Communicate Across Cultures

e. Mutual Respect for Cultural Diversity

N= 40

Table 5- Mutual Respect for Cultural Diversity

S.No.	Statement	Percentage of Responses		
		Know Well	Some-what Know	Don't Know
1.	Listening to diverse perspectives	80	16	04
2.	Avoiding ethnocentrism	78	12	10
3.	Appreciating different cultural practices	82	10	08
4.	Team collaboration across cultures	76	14	10
5.	Using inclusive language and behavior	78	12	10

1. **Listening to Diverse Perspectives-** A high 80% of students report that they know well how to listen to and understand perspectives from different cultural backgrounds. This reflects a strong foundation in empathy, openness, and intercultural awareness, critical for inclusive dialogue.
2. **Avoiding Ethnocentrism-** 78% of respondents demonstrate an ability to recognize and set aside their own cultural biases.This suggests a healthy level of self-awareness and non-judgmental attitude in cross-cultural interactions.
3. **Appreciating Different Cultural Practices-** The highest score (82%) shows that most students genuinely value and appreciate cultural diversity.This strong positive attitude can serve as a motivating force behind inclusive actions and openness to learning from others.
4. **Team Collaboration Across Cultures-** 76% of students are confident in their ability to work effectively in multicultural groups.This reflects a strong capacity for cooperation, adaptability, and respect within team dynamics.
5. **Using Inclusive Language and Behavior-** A solid 78% of students are aware of the importance of using language and gestures that are inclusive and respectful. This shows that most students are conscious of the impact of words and expressions in maintaining respectful intercultural dialogue.

Overall, this category reflects a strong foundational value base, making it a promising area to build deeper communication and leadership competencies.

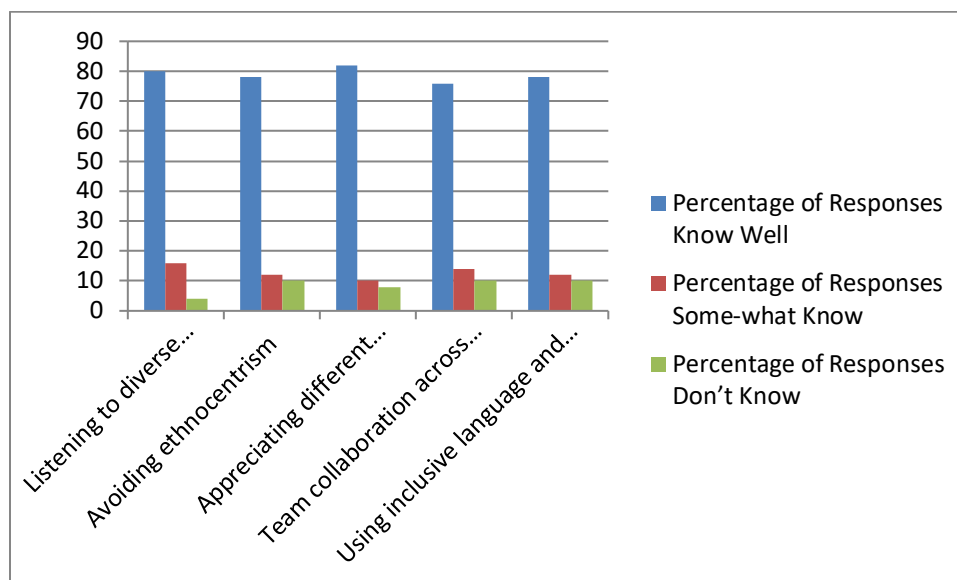


Figure 5- Percentage of Mutual Respect for Cultural Diversity

7.2 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis of responses of students give a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges faced and strategies employed in cross-cultural communication. On analysis of FGDs and open ended questions, recurring themes were identified which indicate both challenges and strategies adopted by graduate students of RIE Bhopal.

a. Challenges/Barriers to Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

Students reported the following challenges when engaging in diverse cultural environments. These challenges resulted in miscommunication, misunderstandings and often led to conflicts.

1. Language Barriers

The biggest challenge encountered by students came in the form of language where students faced difficulty in expressing ideas and understanding in different languages. The problem arose due to tone, accent, unfamiliar vocabulary and variation in sentence structure which led to miscommunication. Students also express that certain idioms, slangs which were specific to certain languages made understanding and grasping the intended meaning very difficult.

2. Misinterpreting cultures

Some students expressed that they found it difficult to understand and interpret cultural nuances correctly. For example, different styles of humour, indirect communication styles and varying levels of formality posed confusion and misinterpretation. Few students also reported cases of unconsciously and unintentionally offending their friends due to a lack of awareness around cultural norms and taboos.

3. Differences in Non-Verbal Communication

Differences that arise from non verbal components of body language, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, etc. gave way to misunderstandings amongst students. As non verbal cues vary from culture to culture, they posed problems for students resulting in misinterpretation of the cues.

The above challenges indicate that though students acknowledge cultural differences; they face challenges and often struggle with practical applications in real world scenarios, pointing to the urgent need for hand holding and experiential learning.

b. Strategies Used by students to Navigate Cross-Cultural Communication

Though students face challenges in Cross-Cultural Communication, they still found ways and strategies to navigate through such situations. Some of the strategies students adopted are mentioned below-

1. Listening actively

Many students opine that active listening can be helpful in many situations. Students said that they practiced careful and active listening during conversations. They found that paying attention to the speaker's words, tone and body language helped them to identify and understand the intended message more accurately which reduced the chances of misinterpretation.

2. Asking Questions to clarify

In order to avoid miscommunication students also clarified their doubts if any by asking follow up questions so that they correctly understood the intended meaning. They adopted and practiced summarizing, rephrasing and asking for confirmation as ways to bridge the gaps in communication.

3. Adjusting Tone and Gestures

Students recognize the importance of varying non verbal cues across cultures, wherein, few students make a conscious effort to observe and change their body language, gestures, hand and eye movements, facial expressions to make them more agreeable and accepted in the cultural context. A change in tone, hand gestures and body language helped them to avoid and upgrade their understanding of nuanced cultural norms.

The above strategies reflect the urge and willingness on the part of the students to learn and adapt to diverse cultural settings but also point towards the need for continuous practice, exposure and improvement.

8. Recommendations/ Educational Implications

Based on the above discussion the following recommendations are being made to cope with the growing demand of adapting in different cultural environments, which is a very important skill that has to be acquired by the students of the 21st century. The recommendations focus on integrating both theoretical and practical implications of cross cultural communication.

1. Incorporate cross-cultural communication modules in graduate programs
2. Encourage participation in regional, national and international student exchange programs
3. Use interactive teaching methods such as role-plays, case studies, group discussions and debates
4. Provide structured feedback on students' communication strategies and styles and suggest improvements
5. Organize extracurricular activities like cultural festivals, language exchange programs, organize guest lectures and mentorship programs that promote intercultural engagement
6. Institutions can make sure that their curriculum is aligned with the goals of NEP 2020 and NCF, which emphasize on building global competencies, multilingualism and multiculturalism

9. Conclusion

The study underscores the need and importance of cross-cultural communication in the present world and integrating it in the graduate program. It suggests that though students have a good theoretical understanding of concepts, they lack the ability to wade through practical real world situations. The study also highlights bridging the gap that exists between theory and practice and providing students with more experiential and immersive environments. It offers certain practical recommendations which may help our students to approach the world in a better manner; adjust and adapt to diverse cultural settings which has become the order of the day. As Ting-Toomey (1999) opines, 'non-verbal communication can vary significantly across cultures, leading to

misunderstandings if not properly understood', highlighting the importance of educational institutions to provide training in non verbal communication. It also provides an opportunity to institutions to reflect on their syllabi and check whether it meets with the growing demands of the changing world around us and prepare them for the varied professional environments.

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