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Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication

LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION COMPETENCES: A STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

Rapid globalization and integrated business activities make it necessary to acquire intercultural communicative competences, which is one of the major objectives of teaching and learning of foreign languages. Our article delves into interpersonal interpretations, perceptions and the problems associated with intercultural communication skills today. Intercultural communication takes place when parties of distinct cultural backgrounds discuss projects, business plans, and strategic ideas in a language(s) other than theirs. However, the degree of socio-economic integration has brough about an increase in global business and trade, which has also given rise to such interactions among people, thus making it necessary for productive intercultural business communication to be taught and learnt at various levels life. The importance of intercultural business communication skills is justified and the processes of attaining and enhancing these skills have been identified and argued in this paper. It was established that Thus, it is, therefore, instructive to international organizations, companies and individuals in such agencies (who are either working, acting for or representing them) to ensure that effective intercultural communication is maintained in their institutions as this will subsequently promote tolerance and understanding, hence intercultural decision-making.

Keywords: Business communication skills, foreign language, intercultural, integration, strategic communication, English.

1. Introduction

Every individual is shaped either directly or indirectly by the culture of their society, thus the beliefs, perceptions, and behaviour of each of us largely hinge on these cultural settings. However, these beliefs, perceptions and understanding of things are so integrated that nobody even thinks about them until we get confronted with another culture and its ways of doing things. This article starts by evaluating personal understandings of active intercultural business communication skills and their significance, followed by assessment of personal intercultural business communication skills and underlining various ways of developing and improving these skills.

2. Problem Statement

Civilisation and globalisation have done a lot of good to our world of today, especially to the business community. However, one outstanding issue currently to be dealt with is intercultural issues, that in communication and the understanding of things which involve individuals' or societal perceptions, beliefs, and values. Thus, cultural clash is one of the major setbacks of business communication and decision-making. The fact that every society or community has their own norms, beliefs, perceptions, and standards appear to have a great influence on every human to a large extend. Hence, this tends to create, either directly or indirectly, some form of intercultural clashes, confrontations, or misconceptions among individuals.

This paper identifies this topic as one of the important societal problems that affect the lives of individuals, businesses, and others. Thus, it would be important to address some of the pertinent issues that confront people of distinct cultural settings, especially in the teaching and learning of foreign languages as this becomes one of the relevant means of educating people about the differences of customs, perceptions and standards of other people, and the ways of avoiding, as well as dealing with such issues when they arise.

3. Research Questions

Currently, globalisation and digital communication (social media) have eased a lot of hurdles, especially in the dissemination of information, to a larger section of the world's population. However, have your reflected on some of the causes of miscommunication or misunderstanding, in other words cultural clashes, and the ways of dealing with them holistically? In the quest to achieve the research objective of this paper, we seek to answer the following research questions, which form the core of our article. Why is there the need for intercultural communication skills, and what is its role for individuals, firms, and international institutions.

3.1. What role does interpersonal competence play in the life of individuals?

And how can individuals achieve or attain efficient intercultural communication skills?

3.2. What is the place of intercultural communication competences in businesses and international organisations?

How does intercultural business communication skills influence the day to day activities of firms and institutions?

4.   Purpose of the Study

Globalisation and integrated business activities call for an improved intercultural communication among individuals, organisations, and firms. Hence, the need to examine and study the effects of intercultural business communications on individuals and institutions and proffer various means of inculcating the required skills and competences. Thus, this paper examines and outlines the way of dealing with cultural clashes, as well as how to promote effective intercultural communication skills.

One of the major ways of tackling intercultural issues and improving intercultural business communication is working on individual perceptions, understanding and values. An efficient intercultural communication entails self-analysis, self-awareness, and interpretation (Ostendorf, 2012). It is interesting to note that it would be difficult for an individual without self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-analysis to understand third parties. Thus, true personal understanding and awareness would lead to general insight and acceptance of cultural differences, which serves as the gateway to an efficient intercultural business communication. This does not necessarily imply that you should agree with the viewpoint of another culture and/or adopt its values. However, this means that people of different cultures must assess their various priorities and ascertain how they can do or get the best performance working together, despite being different in terms of cultural viewpoints or values.

5.   Research Methods

Learning to achieve effective intercultural business communication skills, it will be realized that a couple of cultural conditions will always come to bear by a person going into another culture, who would automatically have to adapt or succumb to these conditions. This, nevertheless, does not suggest that one must forget or reject their own culture, and deny its related priorities. Relatively, it implies studying what inspires others and in what manner other cultural priorities inform the behaviour, attitudes and values of business partners or collaborators. Thus, this can be termed as "addition but no subtraction approach", which means that one is required to add to their own culture, but not deduct from it. For instance, a Russian businessman going to Ghana should adapt to the distinct Ghanaian practices, likewise a Ghanaian businessman must adopt to a range of Russian traditions.

It is therefore obvious that in any intercultural interactions, variations will be encountered, thus our expectations might or mostly would not be met exactly. Openness and willingness to absorb, therefore, depict how skilled a person is in intercultural business communication. It is worth noting that translation errors are avoided in effective intercultural communication by using simple language and frequently repeating key points in various ways (Peng & Fan, 2011). Furthermore, it is instructive to do away with lengthy, complicated sentences, jargons, and others that lead to complications and vagueness, and this will help in achieving optimal communication and understanding among people.

6. Findings

The following are some are some of the ways through which we experience a new culture: euphoria, frustration, adjustment, and integration (Fu, 2010). One must therefore take some necessary measures in account in order to attain the status of a skilled intercultural business communicator, which involves some degree of analysis, understanding, and implementation of the various strategies. Thus, in developing intercultural communication skills it is imperative to use categories, say the use of tools for comparing and understanding different cultures (Yang, 2013). Even though everyone is culturally based and culturally biased to a certain extent, by taking off our cultural blinders and developing some level of sensitivity in the way one speaks and behaves, which is not always easy, provides a stronger foundation in understanding the perspectives of another culture. Implementing what has been learned from the intercultural communication competences bridges the cultural gap and variations. Beginning to act in accord with the other culture's traditions and values will initially be difficult, but later, when the reluctance to assimilate this cultural practices wanes, positive results come with ease. At this stage, we begin to walk in the shoes of the other culture, making us achieve the ultimate goal of studying about a particular culture to gain the skills of communicating with that culture, and to behave as though we are from that culture.

Knowledge on cultural history and etiquette is a cornerstone in achieving productive intercultural communication. For instance, being knowledgeable about how to appropriately offer a business card and who to expect or receive one from first sets the platform for a fruitful business interaction. Effective intercultural business communication necessitates basic understanding of cultural mores and adjusting business communication style alongside as much as possible. Listening actively leads to cross-cultural interpersonal sensitivity, which defines the ability to hear what is said, mentioned or meant by individuals from a foreign culture, and the capability to foresee how they will respond or react (Ainsworth, 2013). Thus, optimism, openness to new ideas, and valuing cultural variations are the ways of improving and achieving effective communication skills.

7. Conclusion

This paper outlines intercultural competence in business communication using an integrative approach. Thus, intercultural competence is portrayed as the interplay of the personal, the societal, and the professional, as well as calculated sub-competencies that correlate with knowledge, reasoning, conduct, and influence. Also, intercultural skill was hypothesized based on the model of culture as involving manifold factors or elements. This means that there is no cultural norm valid for all in a specified culture, as each culture has a wide scope of diversity. Individuals participate in different collectives but see themselves as representatives of a specific culture.

The paper justifies intercultural communication competences as one of the gateways to achieving the goals of business communications, especially major decision-making processes among people of different cultural backgrounds. It is therefore imperative to incorporate intercultural communications skills in the teaching and learning of foreign languages so as to equip individuals with the ability to avoid viewing other people's customs and perceptions with their cultural blinders, which enables them to understand and address issues of cultural differences.

Acknowledgments

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