

COMMUNICATION AMONG STUDENTS IN A MULTI CULTURAL LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS' HOSTEL, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

BY

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DECLARATION

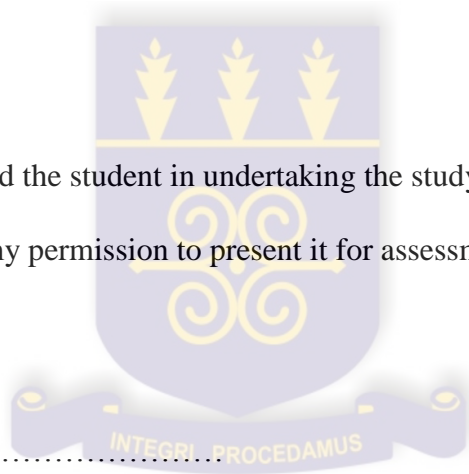
I declare that, except for the acknowledged sources, I have personally, under supervision, undertaken the study herein submitted.

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JOSEPHINE APPIAH-NYAMEKYE

FEBRUARY, 2015.

I declare that I have supervised the student in undertaking the study submitted herein, and confirm that the student has my permission to present it for assessment.



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PROF. AUDREY GADZEKPO

FEBRUARY, 2015.

DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to God, my family, Sanny and the entire 2012/2013 class of SCS.



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ABSTRACT

This research studied the communication patterns of students from different parts of the world, residing at the University of Ghana International Students' Hostel. Five focus group discussions were conducted on a total of 35 American, European, Francophone African, Nigerian and Ghanaian Students at the International Students' Hostel.

The Intercultural Communication Model posits that one's culture influences his or her communication pattern. The differences in communication patterns lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations during interactions of people from diverse cultures.

Although the participants all communicated in English, the research found out that the students had expressions and accents that were peculiar to their nationalities.

Findings also revealed differences in nonverbal forms of communication. Whereas the American, European and Francophone African students were indifferent towards greeting and the use of the left hand, Nigerians and Ghanaians considered greeting to be important and frowned upon the use of the left during interactions. Unlike Americans, the Ghanaian and Nigerian students thought it was rude to maintain eye contact during conversation. Lateness to meetings and appointments was also found to be normal and expected among Africans but was considered irritating and a sign of disrespect among American and European students.

A significant similarity among the participants was that they did not encourage touching from strangers.

Although the students faced challenges while communicating with others from different cultures, there were very few instances of misunderstandings and no conflict arose as result of these misunderstandings.



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The world has now become a global village. Globalization, fuelled by the improvement in technology, international trade, internationalization of institutions, and the increase in travel and tourism, has made it inevitable for people from different countries and cultural backgrounds to meet and interact on a daily basis.

The trend of international movement includes students in higher education. A growing number of students are pursuing their higher education in countries other than theirs each year. Universities are thus becoming more global in their operations, (Varghese 2008).

According to Tiessen (2007), factors that contribute to this globalization of higher education include students' demand for opportunities to learn in other parts of the world and governments' commitments to increase funding and provide opportunities for students to go abroad.

Universities in countries such as the USA, the UK, Germany, France and Australia attract the largest number of foreign students. Asian countries also top the list of countries whose students study in other countries, followed by Europe, Africa, North America and then South America (OECD, 2004).

1.1.1 University of Ghana's International Students' Programmes

The University of Ghana is the oldest and largest public university in Ghana. It was founded in 1948 as the University College of the Gold Coast to provide and promote university education, learning and research. In the 1960s, it became a University with the power to award its own degrees.

The University of Ghana is a member of the International Association of Universities (IAU), the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and the Association of African Universities (AAU). The University of Ghana is also a member of the League of World Universities, which comprise 47 universities all over the world.

The University has established academic and research links with other universities and research institutions around the world. Examples are the Norwegian Universities' Committee for Development Research and Education (NUFU), the Council for International Educational Exchange (CIEE) in New York, International Student Exchange Programmes (ISEP) and the Commonwealth Universities Student Exchange Consortium (CUSAC) (<http://www.ug.edu.gh>).

The University does not offer courses only to Ghanaian but to international students too. Over 1000 foreign students are enrolled in the University of Ghana each year. There is an International Students' Programme Office in the University, which promotes and coordinates all activities of all international students, visiting scholars, staff on exchange, external staff training programmes and research collaboration. The office processes international exchange/study abroad students' application for admission and arranges for accommodation for the international students.

Student exchange programmes from institutions such as the International Students Exchange Programme (ISEP), the Council of International Educational Exchange (CIEE), University of California Education Abroad Programme (UC-EAP), SUNY Brockport, Swarthmore University, the University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC) have resident coordinators in the offices of the International Students Programmes (Gyasi, 2013, Personal Conversation).

In the 2011/2012 academic year, a total of 1,181 international students enrolled in the University of Ghana. There were 495 visiting students, 512 international undergraduate students, 144 international graduate students, 20 English Proficiency Students, six occasional students and four research affiliates. The students came from all over the world - Asia, Australia, Europe, North-America, South America, as well as other African countries. (See Table 1 below).

Table 1. Representation of International Students by Country
(2011/2012 Academic Year)

COUNTRY	NUMBER
Argentina	1
Australia	1
Belize	1
Benin	12
Botswana	2
Brazil	1
Burkina Faso	9
Cameroun	15
Canada	21
China	20
Congo	5
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	2
Egypt	2
Eritrea	1
Ethiopia	2
France	8
Gabon	13
Germany	14

Guinea	4
India	2
Ivory Coast	13
Japan	1
Kenya	3
Korea	8
Lebanon	1
Liberia	30
Malawi	3
Mali	8
Mexico	1
Mozambique	1
Namibia	1
Niger	10
Nigeria	460
Norway	17
Rwanda	2
Sierra Leone	14
South Africa	2
Sweden	3
Tanzania	8
The Gambia	5
Togo	21

Uganda	3
U.K	11
U.S.A	415
Zambia	1
Zimbabwe	2
Total	1,181

Some of the international students stay in the International Students' Hostels I and II. In order to promote interaction between the international students and Ghanaian students, the University allows some Ghanaian students to also reside in the Hostels. Currently, there are about 320 students from Europe, North America, Asia and other African countries residing with about 100 Ghanaian students in the International Students' Hostel.

1.1.2 Culture and Communication

According to Samovar et al. (2007:230), communication does not take place in a void. Hence it is not immune from external influence. It is therefore evident that all human interaction is to some degree influenced by the cultural, social and physical settings in which it occurs.

Du Plooy, Cilliers and Louw (2006:9) said that communication and culture are interrelated and reciprocal. When communicating in an intercultural setting it is important to bear in mind the cultural differences in communication. According to Gamble & Gamble (2010:11), people formulate and interpret messages depending on their culture. Cultural diversity influences the

meanings one attributes to communication. Hence what may be seen as acceptable communication behaviour in one culture may not be the same in another.

1.1.3 Cultural and Verbal Communication

Each culture has its own language, guided by its own vocabulary, syntax, grammar, phonology, and pragmatics (Matsumoto, 2006). According to Jandt (2003:40), language is a way of marking cultural identity. The meanings of a particular language point to the culture of a particular social group, and the analysis of those meanings involves the analysis and comprehension of that culture.

1.1.4 Culture and Non Verbal Communication

Pearson et al. (2006:80) define non-verbal communication as the process of using messages that are not words to create meaning. Seiler and Beall (2008:114) affirmed that culture contributes significantly to differences in non-verbal behaviour. Although behaviour such as touching, moving, eye contact, facial expressions and interpersonal distance are natural, humans are not born knowing the meanings of such nonverbal messages. Cultures formulate rules and norms that dictate when, how, and with what situations nonverbal expressions are demonstrated (Seiler and Beall 2008).

However, Seiler and Beall (2008) said, although norms and rules that control the management of behaviour differ from culture to culture, people around the world share common organic and social functions. Hence, there are some similarities in non-verbal communication among cultures.

1.2 Problem Statement

An individual's cultural background influences the way he or she communicates (Samovar et al, 2010). Hence, people from different cultural backgrounds usually communicate and interpret messages differently according to their cultural context. These differences in communication patterns among cultures sometimes cause misinterpretation, misunderstanding, anxiety and uncertainty which result in miscommunication (Stephan and Stephan, 2002:127). According to Triandis (2000), people usually miscommunicate when interacting with others from different cultural backgrounds because they assume the others have the same communication patterns as them.

The International Students' Hostel has over 400 students from different countries and cultural backgrounds living together and interacting with one another on a daily basis. How do their cultural differences influence their interactions with one another?

1.3 Objectives

The main objective of this research is to investigate the ways in which communication patterns can vary among different cultural communities. It also seeks to find out the problems that can arise in intercultural communication and how these communication difficulties are overcome.

1.4 Research Questions

The research is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the differences in the use of verbal and nonverbal cues among the various cultural groupings?

RQ2. What are the challenges the students face when communicating with those from other cultural backgrounds.

RQ3. How do the students negotiate the communication challenges?

1.5 Significance of the Study

As the University of Ghana grows, it becomes more intercultural as more international students register here. This research will serve as a basic guide for communication among the different cultures in the University.

Furthermore, although a lot of research has been done on intercultural communication in various parts of the world, not much has been done on communication among students in a Ghanaian learning environment. Findings from this research will go a long way in adding to the already existing literature and provide new insights into the differences and similarities of communication patterns among different cultures.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

2.1. Literature Review

The literature reviewed gave insight into the communication patterns of Asians, Americans and Europeans. This section is grouped into three parts. The first part gave an insight on cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. The second explored the importance of nonverbal cues in intercultural communication. The third also explored/ how students communicate in foreign countries.

2.1.1 Cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication

Research has shown that different cultures have different cultural values and this may cause confusion and conflict between people from different backgrounds. One of such different cultural cues is the issue of privacy. Zhang (2013) used a case study entitled “top secret” to explain the difference between Chinese and Westerners on the issue of privacy. The researcher’s young son in China met an American lecturer and asked her many questions, including her age. The American lecturer hesitated, said her age was a “top secret” and walked away, leaving the Chinese boy confused and wondering what he had done wrong and why the American lecturer refused to tell her age.

Zhang (2013) explained that in Western culture, it is considered rude to ask someone’s age because Western women especially consider their age to be a private matter. He said Westerners consider an individual’s privacy to be important. They want to have their own space and do not like people asking questions about their age, family, profession and income. The Chinese, on the other hand, like to know other people’s private matters and they also do not hide things about

themselves. They do not think they are intruding when they ask personal questions. They believe it is a way of showing concern.

Zhang (2013) concluded that there would be a big gap in intercultural communication when communicating with a foreigner without knowing and understanding the foreigner's cultural values. He therefore suggested that in order to have good communication and maintain good relationships with people from different cultures, people must have intercultural communication competence. Having communication competence means understanding different cultures and cultural values.

Similarly, according to Gao (2006) different cultures have different culturally determined conventions of what they think is the appropriate way of communicating in terms of greeting, eye contact, hand gestures and degree of frankness. Americans are taught to maintain eye contact when talking, but not as much as the British and Arabs. Certain cultures also do not encourage the use of eye contact at all.

Stating the different uses of gestures among cultures, Gao (2006) said whereas Italians use gestures for illustration and display, Jews use gestures for emphasis. Germans also use gestures to portray attitudes and commitment.

In terms of the influence of one's culture on language, Gao (2006: 58) states:

“The meanings of a particular language point to the culture of a particular social group, and the analysis of those meanings—their comprehension by learners and other speakers—involves the analysis and comprehension of that culture”.

Gao said lack of understanding or adequate knowledge about these cultural conventions might lead to misunderstandings (Hinde, 1997 cited in Gao, 2006).

Gao gave an example of a British teacher in Hong Kong who got offended because her students met her in town and asked her: “Where are you going?” She thought the students were being nosy and that she did not have to tell them where she was going. Unbeknownst to her, “Where are you going,” is just a polite greeting in the Chinese culture and no answer is really required. Gao’s work is important to the current study because it demonstrates significant differences in the use and understanding of gestures, hand gestures, eye contact and verbal language among cultures.

In Germany, Beaulieu (2004) also conducted a study to measure interpersonal distance in a cross-cultural environment. Twenty three participants classified in five cultural groups were interviewed. Participants were classified as Anglo-Saxons, Caucasians, Mediterraneans, Asians and Latinos. For the purpose of the study, Anglo Saxons were defined as people from the United Kingdom, United States, and English Canada. Caucasians were also defined as people from Austria, France, The Netherlands, and French Canada.

The process involved a 10 minute individual interview with each participant. The participant’s chair was close to the door, and the interviewer was seated toward the back of the room. Not knowing the real intension of the study, participants were told to bring the chair closer to the interviewer before answering the questions.

Results showed that personal space during interactions varied with culture. Anglo Saxons used the largest zone of personal space, followed by Asians, Caucasians then Mediterraneans. Latinos sat closest to the interviewer during the interview. The study also found out that female - female interactions were closer than were male-female interactions.

2.1.2 Communication among students in a multicultural setting

In a study in China, Shi and Fan (2010) examined the role of non-verbal communication in intercultural communication. Data was collected through interviews and participants' reflective journals of eight Chinese students from the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania in Australia, who had either learnt or taught English as a foreign language.

The participants identified nonverbal forms of communication to be gestures, postures, touching, eye contact and facial expressions. To the participants, nonverbal communication was an important component of human communication. Majority of them had experienced miscommunication in intercultural communication caused by unfamiliarity or inappropriate use of nonverbal cues. The study also found out that participants were more stressed and frustrated when miscommunication was due to non-verbal cues rather than verbal cues. It also took longer for students to overcome miscommunication caused by the wrong use of nonverbal cues.

The participants emphasised the need to incorporate nonverbal communication in foreign language classrooms since the aim of foreign language teaching is to enable learners to communicate with people from different cultures (Shi and Fan, 2010).

Shi and Fan (2010) further argued that body language is a semiotic system as it can stand alone to depict one's emotions, attitude or implied meanings. This research shows that verbal and nonverbal are inseparable concepts of communication.

Ko (2008) researched how primary students deal with intercultural communication in multicultural Australia in times of cultural uncertainty and complexity. This study was planned to investigate intercultural communication in a multicultural classroom in a primary school in Australia. The research employed an ethnographical case study methodology with data collected

from observation, interview and documentation. Two classroom teachers from two classes, the school ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher and 56 Year 7 students were included in the study. Among the 56 students, 24 students were interviewed along with the classroom teachers and the ESL teacher. School documents regarding the promotion of intercultural communication were also collected during the observation period.

The study found that differing language capacities of students and teachers have the greatest influence on intercultural communication. Language was observed to influence positive and negative intercultural communication in the classroom.

Kijima (2005) examined the relation between schooling, multiculturalism and cultural identity by Japanese international students in a suburban high school in Australia. Using participant observation and interviews, the research explored the students' struggle over values, practices and cultural identity. The study found out that the Japanese students in Australia faced barriers such as language, cultural misunderstandings and racism. The students said the language barrier hindered good communication and the ability to make friends with the Australian students. Cultural misunderstandings, direct and indirect racism between the Japanese and Australian students, also led to frustration, anxiety and anger. The Japanese felt European and Anglo-Saxon students were more accepted and could mingle more easily with the Australian students than they could.

Williams (2005) compared study abroad students to students who stay on campus, in terms of their improvement of intercultural communication skills during the course of the semester. Forty-four students of Texas Christian University who had applied for the study abroad programme

were asked to complete a pretest at the beginning of the semester, before going abroad, and a post test at the end of their semester abroad. The change between the two tests was then measured. In order to ensure that the change was caused by their experience abroad, a control group of 48 students who stayed on campus were also tested at the beginning and end of the semester.

The results showed that as predicted, the students who studied abroad generally showed a greater increase in intercultural communication skills than the students who did not study abroad, and students who chose to study abroad had a higher level of intercultural communication skills at the beginning and at the end of the semester than students who did not choose to study abroad, (Williams, 2005).

The study also explored other possible factors that may affect a student's intercultural communication skills. The research found out that whether students studied abroad or not, if they had interactions with people from other cultures by making friends or having romantic relationships, taking classes in foreign language, attending ethnic celebrations or watching foreign language films, their intercultural communication skills would proportionally reflect that exposure, (Williams, 2005).

Williams (2005) concluded that whereas the students who took part in the study abroad programme may have had more experiences of interacting with people from other cultures, the study abroad experience alone was not the major factor of improving intercultural communication skills.

Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide and Shimizu (2004) also investigated factors that lead to Japanese students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second language (L2). Two studies were

conducted. In the first study, consisting of 160 high school students, the researchers hypothesized that WTC leads to more frequent interaction in the second language.

“WTC is a direct result of self confidence in L2 communication which is a combination of communication anxiety and perceived communication competence,” according to Yashima et al. (2004:127).

Through administration of questionnaires, the researchers found out that students who were more willing to communicate in the L2 initiate conversations more. They also found out that the students’ self-confidence about his or her competence in a second language determines their willingness to communicate in that language.

The study was then replicated on 60 students who had participated in study-abroad programmes in the United States. Two sets of questionnaires were administered to them, one before the year-abroad programme and the other during the programme. The results found that the students who had a higher score in WTC prior to departure tended to engage in communication with host nationals more frequently. Those who communicated with hosts more frequently seem to have experienced less difficulty in making friends, and found it less difficult to adjust than those who engaged in communication with hosts less frequently. The study also found out that during their stay abroad, favourable interpersonal communication with members of the host country could boost the students’ confidence and willingness to communicate in the L2.

2.1.3 Importance of nonverbal forms of communication

Kelly et al. (2007) investigated whether gestures play a role in second language learning. They conducted an experiment, teaching adults Japanese verbs with and without iconic hand gestures and then measured the strength of their memory encoding. Results showed that that words

learned with gestures produced deeper and stronger neural memory traces. This means that gestures and speech, when used together, have the tendency of sending a stronger message with meanings lasting longer in one's memory.

Other research also showed that gestures aid learning in second language contexts. For example, Church et al. (2004) studied how gestures aid first-grade Spanish speakers (with English as a second language) learn new mathematical concepts in the English language. The children who did not speak English were made to watch instructional videos in English. Some of the videos contained gestures; others did not. The results showed that the children's understanding of the mathematical concepts improved twice as much when verbal instruction included gestures. The researchers concluded that although the children did not understand the verbal part of the lessons, the gestures represented universal aspects of the mathematical concepts, which are accessible to everyone even if they do not speak a particular language.

Barbara (2002) also affirmed that nonverbal cues of communication convey most emotional meanings and account for nearly 70 per cent of all communication. Looking into past psychology and communication research, Babara (2002) found out that the skill of using nonverbal behaviour signals as a communication vehicle is learnt from childhood just like the way one's vocal language is learnt.

The imperatives of these reviews are to draw parallels and differences in communication patterns among different cultures. The above mentioned literature highlighted mostly on Asians, Americans and Europeans. The present study, however, took a step further to investigate how

Africans, Europeans, Americans communicate with one another in a Ghanaian University setting.

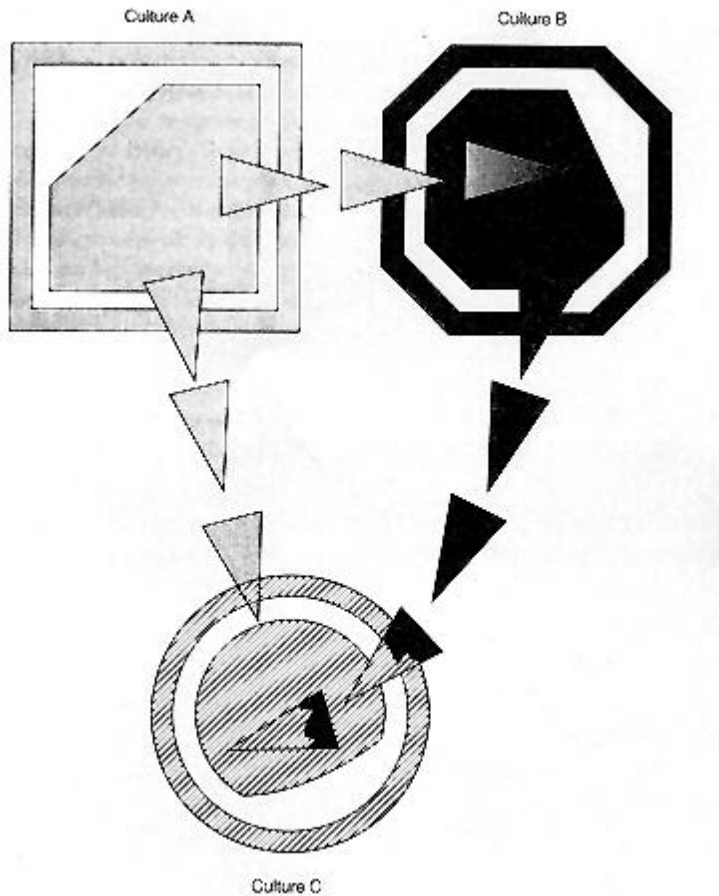
2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

This research is embedded in the framework of the Intercultural Communication model.

Intercultural communication is defined as the process that occurs when two or more cultures or co-cultures exchange messages in a manner that is influenced by their different cultural perceptions and symbol systems, both verbal and non-verbal (Samovar, et. al., 2007).

The model, propounded by Samovar and Porter (1997), posits that as cultures differ from one another, the communication patterns and behaviours of people in these cultures will also differ due to their different perceptions of the world.

The model illustrates the process of how the meaning of a message changes when it is encoded by a person in one culture and decoded by a person in another culture in the context of his or her own cultural background. In some cases the message may be interpreted in a different meaning than was intended.



(Figure 1. Source: Samovar and Porter, 1997)

The diagram above depicts three different cultures. Cultures A and B are similar to one another and different from culture C. The shape inside each culture represents the person who has been molded by that culture. The shape of the person is however different from that of the parent culture since we are all shaped by our culture, but are also influenced by other factors such as age, gender, class and race.

The arrows represent the production, transmission, and interpretation of messages across cultures. When a message leaves one culture, for example, it carries the content of the message as it is intended. When it reaches another culture, the message changes because the new culture influences how the message is interpreted.

The greater the differences between the cultures, the more likely the message will be changed. For example, the change that occurs between cultures A and B is likely to be less than the change between cultures B and C. This is because there is a similarity between cultures A and B, hence the message is interpreted almost like it was originally intended. Since Culture C, is different from cultures A and B, a message from B is likely to be interpreted differently (Samovar and Porter, 1997).

Relying on the model's suggestion that one's culture affects his or her communication patterns and the message he or she sends may not mean the same to someone else from another culture, this study assessed the key communication patterns of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, residing at the International Students' Hostel. The study also explored instances of misunderstandings and miscommunications caused by differences in culture.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Research design

Research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measuring and analysis of data (Kothari, 2004). According to Matveev (2002), intercultural research usually comes in two forms. One form is quantitative research which uses numerical indicators to determine how widespread a phenomenon is. Another is qualitative research which uses symbols and words to find in-depth information about the phenomenon.

This research used the qualitative research approach. Data for the study was collected through focus group discussions. A major strength of qualitative research is that it allows people to describe their experiences in their own words. It conveys a richness and intensity of detail in a way that quantitative research cannot.

3.1 Population and Sampling technique

3.1.1 Population

At the beginning of the sampling process it is important to define the target population so that the proper source from which the data are to be collected can be identified (Castillo, 2009). The population for a study is that group (usually of people) about whom we want to be able to draw conclusions (Babbie, 1991). The population for this study is the residents of the International Students' Hostel at the University of Ghana, Legon. The International Students' Hostel

represents a multicultural setting as international students, who have come to the University from all over the world, stay there together with Ghanaian students. At the moment, there are about 35 Europeans, 18 Asians, two Australians, 110 Northern Americans and 80 Africans residing together with about 100 Ghanaian students in the Hostel.

3.1.2 Sample Size

A sample is a subset of the population that is representative of the entire population (Wimmer & Dominic, 2011). This research sampled 35 students from the International Students' Hostel.

According to Hall (1959), variations in intercultural communication are more likely to be easily identified when there are people with significantly different cultural backgrounds. Hence the research sampled students from various cultural backgrounds in the Hostel.

Eight students from Nigeria were also sampled for the study because Nigerian students constitute the majority of African students in the University of Ghana. The study also sampled seven Francophone African students since Ghana is surrounded mainly by francophone countries. Since American students constitute the majority of international students in the University of Ghana, seven students were sampled from the United States of America. Although they are not many in the University of Ghana, Europeans constitute an important part of the global world. The study therefore sampled six European students in the hostel. Seven Ghanaian students were also sampled because communication patterns of members of the host country were also important to the study.

3.1.3 Sampling Technique

Participants for this study were selected through both purposive and snowballing sampling methods. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which an experienced individual selects the sample based on his or her judgment about some appropriate characteristic required for the sample members (Zikmund, 2003:381-382). Participation in the research was based on the students' residence, nationality, English proficiency, interest and availability to participate in the study. Information was provided by the porters of the International Students' Hostel about the students' nationalities and room numbers. Some rooms in the International Students' Hostel were visited and residents were asked a set of screening questions (Appendix A) in order to determine whether they meet the set criteria.

Snowball sampling uses a small pool of initial informants to nominate, through their social networks, other participants who meet the eligibility criteria and could potentially contribute to a specific study. The students whose rooms were visited also suggested and directed us to other students with similar nationalities who they thought would be willing to participate in the research.

3.2 Data Collection

Data for the research was collected through five focus group discussions. Focus group interviews are "group discussions among carefully selected individuals guided by a skilled moderator who follows a well-constructed but loose and flexible interview guide," (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007, p. 67).

Focus group discussions were deemed appropriate for this study because they allowed for interpersonal contact among the participants from different cultures. According to Krueger (2009), group members influence one another as they interact with one another during the discussions. As such, the researcher was able to observe, first hand, the way communication among these participants took place, taking note of little details.

Morgan (1997) noted that participants for focus group discussions are usually “homogenous strangers”. That means these participants may not know each other but share similar characteristics targeted by the researcher.

Hence, participants for the discussions were grouped according to nationalities or continent. The focus group discussion was guided by a question guide. Question areas on the question guide were based on the objectives of the research and the research questions.

Five focus group discussions were conducted at the television room of the International Students’ Hostel Phase I. Participants were all students of the University of Ghana and residents of the Hostel.

The first discussion took place on 9th September, 2013. Participants comprised eight Nigerians who have stayed in the Hostel for a period between one and three years.

The second discussion, held on 14th September, 2013, involved seven Ghanaians. Five of them have been residents of the Hostel for three semesters and the other two only moved into the hostel this semester (in August).

The third discussion was also held on 14th September, 2013. It involved six European students, one each from France, Greece, Norway, Czech Republic, Germany and Sweden. They had all been in the hostel for a month.

The fourth discussion was on 16th September, 2013. There were seven Americans who had been residents of the International Students' Hostel for seven weeks. There was one student each from California, New York, Washington, San Francisco, New Orleans, Chicago and Massachusetts.

The final discussion was also on the 16th September, 2013. Seven Francophone African students participated in the discussion. There was one student each from Togo, Benin, Mali, Gabon, Burkina Faso and two from Ivory Coast. They have been in Ghana for a period of between one and three years.

Each session was moderated by the researcher and there were two research assistants who took notes, especially on gestures and other non-verbal cues the participants used. There were also audio recording of the sessions, which were later transcribed. The discussion was directed by the moderator, who however adopted a passive role and allowed the discussion to be led primarily by the participants in order to pull out more information and avoid any influence of the moderator on the outcome of the discussion.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

The analysis of the data was based on the research questions. Findings from each focus group discussion were first of all transcribed. A research report was then written for each focus group discussion, with the data structured thematically. Direct quotes of some responses were given to add more depth to the data collected. Similarities and differences in findings from the various group discussions were then analysed.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, findings from each focus group discussion have been grouped under the following themes: language, gestures, eye contact, touching, space, reaction to time, communicating with the left hand, greetings, communication challenges they face, whether challenges lead to conflicts and how they resolve these challenges.

4.1 Nigerian Focus Group Discussion

4.1.1 Language

All the participants agreed that the main difference they have noticed in the use of the English language are the tones and accents. Even though majority of the students in the hostel speak English, they noted that the accents and tones differ according to nationalities. One student said:

“Over here we have American English, European English, Ghanaian English, Francophone English, and of course we Nigerians also have our own way of speaking English. Sometimes even when you do not know the person you can guess where he or she is coming from his from or her accent.”

4.1.2 Gestures

Participants mentioned signs that are common to most nationalities like holding palm out and bobbing fingers in unison to mean “come”, waving the hand to say “bye”, nodding to say “yes” and shaking the head to say “no”.

They however said there are some insulting hand gestures that other nationalities do not understand because they are only peculiar to Nigerians. Examples of such insulting gestures are holding one's palm wide open in someone's face and the thumbs up sign.

Participants said Nigerians usually use a lot of hand gestures during conversations. Three of them said their hand gestures are just a habit and usually do not mean anything nor add to what they are saying. One student said:

It's usually unconscious. At times I don't even know am doing it until someone draws my attention to it.

The rest of the students said they use hand gestures to explain better or put emphasis on what they are trying to say. One student explained:

...especially when the person you are talking to doesn't really understand English or you can't find the right word or expression you can use gestures to explain your point and most of the time they get it.

4.1.3 Communicating with the left hand

Participants said they were not comfortable making gestures or giving directions with the left hand. One student said:

In Nigeria the left hand is believed to be used for things that are unclean so you can't use your left hand to direct somebody or take something from someone. It is a clear sign of disrespect. But over here you see people doing that a lot, especially the whites.

Other participants noted the fact that white students raise their left hands in class. Another student added:

In Nigeria you dare not raise your left hand in a lecture. The lecturer might even walk you out of his class for disrespecting him.

4.1.4 Eye contact

Four of the participants said they do not maintain eye contact when talking to others. They said it is uncomfortable and they believe it is rude to keep staring into someone's eyes when talking.

Two of the participants said maintaining eye contact depends on whom they are talking to. They said in Nigeria, looking into an elderly person's eyes when talking is perceived to be rude and disrespectful but it is acceptable to maintain eye contact with someone of the same age or younger.

Two participants said they think it is important to maintain eye contact while talking. One said he does that to keep the person's attention on him. The other said looking someone straight in the eye makes him know the person's reaction to what he's saying: whether the other person understands, is interested or bored.

4.1.5 Reaction to time

All the participants admitted that they are not usually punctual to meetings and events and so do not really mind when others are late too. They also noted that their American and European friends are usually punctual and complain about their lateness. According to one student:

African timing is bad. We all do it so we are used to it. This meeting was supposed to have started about 30 minutes earlier but some of the girls were late and we still stayed to wait for them. I'm sure an American would have just got up and left.

Another participant added:

I don't know why but whenever I have to go somewhere I will always be at least 10 minutes late no matter how early I start preparing.

4.1.6 Use of space

Seven of the students said Nigerian students generally do not stand too close when communicating with students from other countries. Six out of the eight participants said their reaction to strangers getting close to them when talking depends on the person's gender and appearance. They are uncomfortable if a male stranger gets too much in their personal space.

According to one of the participants:

Ideally people I have only met for the first shouldn't get too close to me when we're talking, especially if it's a guy. If it's a lady and I don't even know her but she's pretty it's more tolerable than a guy. If a strange guy's talking to you and gets so close it gets really awkward and weird and you might not mean to be rude but you'd just instinctively draw back.

One male student however said he did not mind standing close to strangers or people getting into his personal space.

4.1.7 Touching

All the participants agreed that Nigerians are generally touchy people. They touch one another a lot during conversations but that is usually when they know one another. They usually do not encourage touching from strangers. One female student said:

If it's a stranger my reaction will usually depend on three things: who is touching, where he or she is touching and the reason for that touch. If it's a neat decent guy who touches maybe my arm to get my attention or ask a question I wouldn't feel threatened. But if it's some ruffian who just walks to you and starts touching you in sensitive areas of course I won't take it lightly at all.

4.1.8 Greetings

Majority of the participants said they take greetings very seriously because among Nigerians, greeting is a way of showing courtesy and respect to one another. They noted that it is not the same with other nationalities.

Most of the participants said Americans and Europeans usually do not greet but they would just give a warm smile when they meet fellow students.

Three other participants said francophone students usually do not like responding to greetings.

One of them said:

I had an Ivorian roommate last semester and I used to greet her a lot, especially in the mornings when we woke up. But one morning she told me the way I was always greeting was really irritating. I tried explaining to her that that's how I was brought up. But she said greeting wasn't supposed to be compulsory. So I stopped.

4.1.9 Communication challenges they face

All participants mentioned the language barrier as the major problem they face when trying to communicate with the other students. One student said:

Some of them don't even speak English at all. Like my friend's roommate. He's from Korea and it's so funny when we want to ask him something. Sometimes we have to do sign language or he usually carries a tablet around so he makes you type what you are trying to say and then it translates into his language and he also does the same for you to read.

The participants also said the difference in accents and tones among the various nationalities makes it difficult to understand one another. They said American students generally speak very fast and so one must be very attentive in order to hear them clearly.

One student also said:

... even with Ghanaian students who are Africans like us and speak as slowly as we do, it is sometimes difficult for us to understand one another because we have different pronunciations and expressions.

All the participants said it is even more difficult when trying to communicate with francophone and other students from countries that do not have English as their first language. Three of them

said they struggle to make out the words when the non-Anglophone students speak because of their accents. Four others said the non-Anglophone students usually struggle to find the right words and expressions to use during conversations.

One of the students also mentioned the fact that students from other nationalities do not understand Nigerian jokes. She recounted:

There was a time when I told a Ghanaian friend of mine a Nigerian joke and she thought it was hilarious. I repeated the same joke to my American roommate and she had this blank look on her face. She obviously didn't get it. I felt so silly.

4.1.10 Do communication differences lead to conflicts?

Participants noted a few conflicts with other Ghanaian students because they tease them (Nigerians) about their accents and use of certain words.

One student also said she has had a few confrontations with her American roommate because of her frequent use of sarcasm. She said:

They [Americans] may be used to it but it's not really an African thing. I don't think it [sarcasm] is funny because it hurts my feelings when she does that.

The other participants however debunked this point, saying sarcasm is a common form of humour among Nigerians.

4.1.11 How they resolve these challenges

All participants said in instances when students from other nationalities cannot make out their words because of their accent, they usually repeat things over and over again until the other person understands. When it becomes difficult communicating with students with English as their second language, they resort to sign language, dictionaries or interpreters.

4.2 Ghanaian Focus Group Discussion

4.2.1 Language

Participants said though most students in the Hostel speak English there were differences in the other nationalities' accents, diction and expressions. One of the students said:

Those from the non-English speaking countries have very weird accents. And sometimes I think they translate directly from their language into English. I have a francophone friend who would say "You miss me" when he actually means "I miss you". The Americans speak really fast and some of their words seem to mean differently from the British English we learn here in Ghana. For instance they say "first floor" instead of "ground floor", "trunk" instead of "car booth"...

Another student added that

The Nigerian students here, when they want you to do something for them, instead of saying maybe "please buy me water from the shop" they rather say "please help me buy water from the shop". And initially it was confusing when they talked like that because if someone asks me to help him/ her do something I feel we should be doing it together. It was later that someone told me that's how Nigerians ask you to do stuff for them.

Another female student shared her experience about accidentally walking in on a half-naked

Norwegian student:

When I knocked he said "yes". And I thought it was just like how saying "yes" when someone knocks at your door in Ghana means "come in". So I entered and he had just a towel around him and he was looking at me, totally shocked. I guess his "yes" was just a way of inquiring who was knocking.

4.2.2 Gestures

Participants said they use hand gestures to better express themselves or dramatise issues. They mentioned certain common hand gestures that are understood by all. For example, waving to say "bye", nodding or shaking the head to say "yes" or "no", and the middle finger being an obscene insult. They also said in Ghana, holding a fist with one's thumb sticking out and slightly bended is an obscene insult. It is also rude for one to talk with his/her hands on his/her hips. They

complained about the American students saying “come” by turning their palm up beckoning people with their fingers. They considered it rude.

4.2.3 Communicating with left hand

All participants said they consider it rude to use the left hand to take or give something to someone. They however acknowledged the fact that it is not a big deal among the other nationalities. One student said:

I don't really mind if an American takes something from me with his left hand but if it is a Ghanaian I'll take back whatever I was giving to him because in our culture it's rude. So I expect him to know better.

4.2.4 Eye contact

The participants said they maintain little or no eye contact when talking. They said whether or not they have eye contact while talking depends on the relationship they have with the person. The participants said it is okay to maintain a little eye contact with one's peers when talking but it is considered rude to look straight into an elderly person's eyes when talking. One of the participants however said:

Growing up, I learnt not to look into an elderly person's eyes when talking because it shows some sort of deference. And now it's become a habit. I can't look into anyone's eyes when I'm talking. Whether young or old I feel it's rude.

Another participant said:

When I'm talking and someone looks straight in my eyes like that it makes me nervous and sometimes I even forget what I'm saying and start fumbling.

4.2.5 Reaction to time

Five of the participants admitted that they are generally not punctual to class, meetings or events. They said the Ghanaian's lack of punctuality is however not intended to communicate disrespect

or lack of interest for the event. Hence they do not feel offended when people show up for meetings late. According to one of the students:

The interesting thing is that if we schedule a study group meeting at say 10:00 a.m., everyone feels the other person will be late and so we all relax and end up getting there around 11:00 a.m. and no one blames the other because at the end of the day we are all late.

The two other participants, on the other hand, said they are very punctual, really respect the other nationalities that are punctual and get offended by others' lateness. One of them said:

I don't wait for people for more than 30 minutes. If we have a date and you keep me waiting for more than 30 minutes I'm sorry but you won't come and meet me there.

4.2.6 Use of space

Participants said they usually do not get too close to people from the other nationalities during conversations. One student said:

Ghanaians are hospitable but we make a conscious effort to give the other nationalities as much space as possible. Especially the white students because they usually don't want us to get too close when we are talking. You approach them and they take a step back. So we usually just stand back when talking to them to save ourselves the embarrassment.

Three of the participants who were male said they did not really have a problem with female strangers getting close when talking but would draw back if the stranger was male. Three out of the four female participants said they would be a bit more comfortable with female strangers invading their "personal space" than male strangers. The other female participant however jokingly said:

I wouldn't have much of a problem if it's a guy especially if he's cute. The closer he gets to me the better.

4.2.7 Touching

The participants said they are not comfortable with touching or being touched by strangers.

They are more comfortable touching or being touched by friends.

Most of them said when a stranger's touch makes them feel uncomfortable they do not say it outright. They stiffen, pull back or show with a frown on their faces that they are not comfortable.

Two of the participants also noted that holding hands among Ghanaian students gives other nationalities different impressions. One participant said:

It's normal to see a Ghanaian boy and girl walking and holding hands but my roommate says in America people of opposite sex only hold hands like that when they are boyfriend and girlfriend.

4.2.8 Greeting

The participants said they usually greet strangers and elderly people formally —“good morning”, “good afternoon” and “good evening”— when they meet them in enclosed areas in the hostel like the shop, the television room or study room. Friends usually greet one another casually anywhere they meet. Some of the casual greetings include “hi”, “what’s up”, “hey” and “hello”.

4.2.9 Communication challenges they face

Participants mentioned the language barrier as their primary challenge. They said it is difficult to have simple conversations with non-Anglophone students who are not fluent in the English language because they usually misinterpret or can barely make out their words.

They said Americans talk a bit too fast but that is not much of a challenge. They just have to pay close attention to understand one another.

4.2.10 Do communication differences lead to conflict?

The participants said they are yet to witness a major conflict caused by misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what someone intended to say. Some of the female participants recounted minor arguments they have had with Nigerian and francophone students while trying to correct their English. One of them said:

When you get what they [Nigerians and francophone Africans] are trying to say and you try correcting them they rather take offence. The last time a Nigerian girl came to the shop asking for her “balance” and we were trying to tell her the right word is “change” and that “balance” is only used in the bank. But she got angry, saying Ghanaians feel we speak perfect English so we just left her.

The three male participants however said they do not try correcting their other male friends when they make mistakes.

4.2.11 How they resolve communication challenges

Participants said in instances when they do not understand or hear someone well they ask for clarification, or pay attention to the person’s gestures or facial expressions.

If I am around foreigners who are speaking a language I don’t understand then I really pay attention to their facial expressions. I am able to read the basic ones like “anger”, “joy”, “fatigue”, “stress”, “mockery”, and “uneasiness”. I think the negative things are usually easier to read.

One of the students also said in instances that she thinks whatever the person is trying to say is irrelevant she just smiles, acts like she understands and walks away.

They also said most of the African students in the hostel have started trying to speak English with an American accent. They call it LAFA- Locally Acquired Foreign Accent.

4.3 European Focus Group Discussion

4.3.1 Language

All six participants do not have English as their first language but they learnt English language in their countries. Participants said the African English accent and pronunciations are different and a bit difficult to understand. The French participant also said that the African French is somewhat different. According to her:

They [francophone African students] have interesting accents and some words that do not exist in real French. Like “welcome” is “bienvenue” in French but they say “bonne arrive”. I was asked to interpret a Togolese lady to some people and I didn’t understand her myself.

The Czech and Norwegian participants seemed to struggle a bit with the English language. They admitted they were more comfortable speaking with one another than the American and other European students because they are speak slowly and occasionally make mistakes when speaking English.

4.3.2 Gestures

The participants gave different meanings of certain gestures. For instance, making a circle with the index finger and thumb, which means something is good to the American, means something or someone is worthless to the French. The same gesture, according to the German participant, is an obscene sign.

Participants also said they raise hands and bob fingers up and down to say “goodbye”. Waving one’s hands back and forth does not mean “good bye” to most Europeans. It means “no”.

Also thumbs-up sign means “one” in Germany and an obscene insult in Greece. The Greek participant said in certain parts of Greece nodding one’s head means “no” and shaking one’s head means “yes”.

All participants said they consider it rude to draw someone's attention by snapping of fingers or hissing. The Norwegian participants said:

It is unacceptable. We only use that for animals.

4.3.3 Communicating with the left hand

All participants said they do not have any strict cultural rule against the use of the left hand in communicating and so they use the left hands whenever they want to. They said they have however been warned not to raise their left hands in class as it is a sign of disrespect to Ghanaian lecturers.

4.3.4 Eye contact

Whereas the Norwegian and Swedish participants said they use eye contact a lot, the other participants said they do not. The German participant said:

We are more cold. We don't mind looking once in a while but we don't stare into people's eyes when talking.

4.3.5 Reaction to time

Participants said even though they are very punctual and find lateness to be disrespectful, they are gradually getting used to lateness in Ghana. The Czech participant said:

It's a problem for us when people are late, especially when they come with no excuse. I think it's disrespectful but I'm trying to get used to it, especially since we know it's part of the African culture.

4.3.5 Use of space

Participants said they maintain enough distance when they meet someone for the first time. They are more relaxed and stand closer to friends and relations when talking. They also said it is rude when people enter their rooms without knocking.

4.3.7 Touching

All the participants said they did not like touching or being touched by others, especially strangers, during conversations. One of the participants said:

Sometimes I don't want to mix with some people because they like touching.

4.3.8 Greetings

All participants said aside from the normal “hello”, “hi”, they also greet with handshakes. They however prefer brief and firm handshakes and feel uncomfortable when people hold their hands for too long and make bumpy movements with their hands during handshakes. The German participant said it is rude for someone to keep his other hand in his pocket when shaking hands. The French participant said French ladies usually greet with kisses on the cheeks.

4.3.9 Communication challenges they face

All participants said they have problems hearing and understanding the African accent. The Norwegian and Czech participants said they get lost in conversations with the other Europeans and Americans because they speak too fast.

4.3.10 Do communication differences lead to conflict?

Participants said their communication challenges have not caused any serious conflicts. They said they do not like the fact that Africans talk in loud voices, touch a lot and are not time conscious but they see every other cultural difference as normal because they knew about most of them before coming to Ghana. The Czech participant said:

When others make fun of my mistakes I don't care. I also make fun of their accent or mannerisms. Making fun of other people is typical of Czech humour so it's fun.

4.3.11 How challenges are resolved

Participants said they ask people to repeat sentences when they do not hear or understand them.

4.4 American Focus Group Discussion

4.4.1 Language

Participants acknowledged the fact that other nationalities think they talk too fast. They also said most non-American students have accents that are sometimes difficult to make out. They also do not understand the Ghanaian Pidgin English.

Participants also said sarcasm is considered humorous in America but it is not the same here in Ghana.

4.4.2 Gestures

Participants gave examples of gesture that are peculiar to Americans and their meanings. For instance, crossing of fingers means they are wishing for luck; scratching of hair depicts confusion, making quotation signs in the air when talking depicts sarcasm, stick one's hand in the air and making a beckoning sign with one finger means "come here".

They have noticed that the African students get offended when they do the American "come here" sign and so have learnt the African way of saying "come". They however said that bobbing of fingers sign that means "come" in Africa actually means "goodbye" in America.

4.4.3 Communicating with left hand

Participants said they use the left hand for everything they can do with the right hand too and it is accepted in America. Non acceptance of the use of the left hand in Ghana, to them, is a cultural shock.

4.4.4 Eye Contact

Participants said Americans are taught to maintain eye contact while talking. They said avoiding eye contact is a sign of insincerity, rudeness or weakness.

4.4.5 Reaction to Time

The participants complained about lateness of African students, Ghanaians especially, to gatherings. They also complained that Ghanaian lecturers are sometimes up to 30 minutes late for lectures and do not render apologies or excuses for their lateness. According to one of the participants:

Lateness in our part of the world is considered rude but during our first week here [in Ghana] we learnt that GMT actually means 'Ghana Man's Time'. Nothing is ever on time here.

4.4.6 Use of space

The participants said they do not want people too close when they are talking. When someone gets too close they pull back. They also do not like it when people go to their rooms to visit them unannounced or touch their personal belongings without permission. They feel it is an invasion of their space.

4.4.7 Touching

Participants said Americans generally are not touchy people. They do not like being touched, especially by strangers. One of the participants said:

It's okay if it's a gentle pat or tap, like on the shoulder or something. But if you must touch me please don't linger!

4.4.8 Greetings

Participants said they usually greet one another with “hello”, “hi”, “what’s up”. When they meet people for the first time, they usually greet them with firm handshakes. The fist-to-fist greeting is also common among guy friends.

Participants also said they do not talk to strange people when they walk into places like the restaurants, classrooms or stores. According to one of the students:

When we walk into a restaurant or a store, we notice most Ghanaians greet people in there. Well, you wouldn't get greetings from us. We just buy what we need and leave.

4.4.9 Communication challenges they face

Participants said the only challenges they face are when people do not really hear them well because of how fast they speak or when some of their gestures are misinterpreted as being rude.

4.4.10 Do communication differences lead to conflict?

Participants said the differences in communication have not yet led to any significant conflict. There have been a few awkward and embarrassing moments when they realized their gestures especially have been misinterpreted, or when have to keep repeating themselves before they are clearly understood. According to one of the participants:

It was a bit uncomfortable during our first week here but we're now getting used to it. We even make fun of each other sometimes.

4.4.11 How challenges are resolved

Participants said they repeat words slowly or use synonyms until the person understands. They sometimes use gestures and sign language when necessary.

4.5 Francophone African Focus Group

4.5.1 Language

Participants said they all had to take an English proficiency course in the University of Ghana for a year before they could start their normal courses. In spite of that they are not as fluent and do not speak as fast as the Americans. They also said Ghanaians and Nigerians have funny accents.

They said the various Francophone African countries have differences in the way they speak the French language they speak, in terms of accents and expressions. According to one of the Ivorian participants:

I think our local languages influence our French because the way we speak is even different from how a true French man from France speaks. The youth in my country also have a special language that's a mixture of French and our local languages. We call it "nuchi". It's just like French but if you're not from Ivory Coast it will be difficult for you to understand.

4.5.2 Gestures

Participants said they talk a lot with gestures, especially when they cannot find the right words to express themselves well in English. They mentioned gestures that have similar meanings such as nodding, shaking the head and saying goodbye. They said some gestures are used as codes. For instance, winking among friends is some sort of secret code that means they know something they cannot say aloud for others to hear. One of the participants said:

It doesn't mean I am interested in you like how most Ghanaians understand it.

4.5.3 Communicating with the left hand

Participants said they do not understand why the use of the left hand is such a big deal in Ghana.

Slightly irritated, one of the participants asked:

They are all hands so why can't we use it for everything?

4.5.4 Eye contact

Participants said they hardly maintain eye contact when talking. They do not think it is rude.

They are just not used to it.

4.5.5 Reaction to time

The participants' responses about their reaction to time were varied. The Gabonese and Malian participants said they really respect time and get moody when others are late. The two Ivorian students admitted that they are always late for meetings and functions. The Beninois, Togolese and Burkinabe participants said they were indifferent because they know lateness is normal in Africa.

4.5.6 Use of Space

Participants said they are comfortable when their friends, especially fellow Francophone students, are close when talking. They however do not encourage strangers to draw too close to them when talking.

4.5.7 Touching

Touching during conversations is normal, according to the Ivorian and Gabonese participants.

The rest said it depends on the relationship one has with the person and the way the person

touches. They noticed Americans do not like touching and being touched. They also complained that Ghanaians touch them too much when talking.

4.5.8 Greeting

Participants said Francophone Africans usually greet one another with hugs and three kisses on the cheeks. They said they adopted that style of greeting from the French. The Ghanaian and Nigerian students in the Hostel find it a little weird but Americans and Europeans are fine with it.

4.5.9 Challenges in communication

All the participants said their major challenge is the linguistic barrier between them and the other because English is not their first language. They said people do not understand what they say because of their francophone accent and pronunciations.

They also said it is difficult to have long conversations with Americans and Europeans because they speak too fast.

Participants also said sometimes they do not use the right words to express themselves. One of the participants said:

There is something we call “des faux amis”. They are French words that are written and pronounced almost the same in English but they have different meanings. We sometimes use them without knowing and it makes our English sound funny and difficult to understand.

4.5.10 Do communication differences lead to conflict?

Participants said there have not been any major fights or quarrels in the hostel because of challenges in communication. They however said the Ghanaian students sometimes mock them

when they do not say things right. Some of the participants said having to ask people to explain or repeat words or expressions and sometimes it makes the conversation boring.

4.5.11 How challenges are resolved

Participants said they repeat or make people repeat what they are trying to say, sometimes in different words when they do not understand them. They also resort to interpretation by fellow students. However, five of the participants said they have resolved not to speak much around Anglophone students to avoid being mocked.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussion

This study sought to find out the variations in communication patterns among cultures represented in the Hostel, communication challenges the students face and how they resolve these challenges.

This section discusses the findings in the previous chapter in relation to the related study earlier discussed and the intercultural communication model that guided this study. The discussion was done according to the study's research questions.

5.2 Communication Patterns

Samovar and Porter's (2007) intercultural communication model posits that communication patterns differ among cultures. The communication patterns this study explored were verbal language, gestures, eye contact, the use of touching and space, attitude towards time, greeting and communicating with the left hand. As predicted by the intercultural communication model, the study discovered various differences in the communication patterns of the students caused by the differences in culture. However, there were also certain communication patterns that were common to all the cultures in the Hostel.

5.2.1 Language

The study confirmed what is in the dominant literature (Kikima 2005; Ko,2008; Yashima et al. 2002) that differing language of people from different communities have the greatest influence

on intercultural communication. The study found that the individual cultures influence the students' accents even when they have the same lingua franca. The nationalities of students are easily identified through their accents, which is very much expected in almost every multicultural setting. Take Ghana for example; though English is the lingua franca some people are identified according to their accents which are usually influenced by their various ethnic groups. Their cultures also influence their vocabulary and meanings they attach to certain words and expressions. For instance, the Nigerian students have expressions in the English language that Ghanaian, American and European students might not understand.

Likewise, the Francophone African students have French words and expressions, peculiar to the individual countries, which do not mean the same to the French.

There is also the American – British English dichotomy that makes it difficult for the American and Ghanaian students to understand one other. Ghanaian students have been trained to speak and write the British English, which is different from American English in terms of pronunciation and meanings of certain words. For instance, whereas Americans say “first floor” instead of “ground floor”.

The African students were also noted to have a similar trend of mixing their local language with their lingua franca to create a unique slang. It is known as pidgin and “nuchie” among Anglophone and Francophone Africans respectively. However, a Nigerian, for instance, might not understand the Ghanaian pidgin because of the influence of the local language.

5.2.2 Gestures

Participants gave examples of gestures that have their own meanings and can send messages without adding speech. This confirms Shi and Fan's (2010) argument that body language is a semiotic system that can stand alone to depict one's emotions, attitude or implied meanings.

A gesture, like sticking out the middle finger, was identified by all the participants to be an obscene insult. Other gestures, however, meant differently according to cultures. For example, bobbing one's fingers up and down meant "goodbye" to the European students but meant "come" to the African students. Nodding and shaking the head to say "yes" and "no" respectively to most of the students meant the opposite to the Greek student. The American thumbs-up sign, which is an indication that something is fine, is also considered an insult in Ghana, Nigeria and Greece.

Similar to Kelley's (2007) findings that gestures combined with speech send a stronger message, most of the students in this study said they use gestures to better express themselves when the other person does not understand what is being communicated. To a few of the students, however, their gestures do not communicate any meanings. They are just habits of talking.

Some participants of the study said they could easily read the facial expressions of others even in instances when they did not really understand what they were saying. This is in agreement with Seiler and Beall's (2008) assertion that certain universal facial expressions, such as those indicating sadness and fear, are easily understood across varying cultures.

5.2.3 Communicating with the left hand

Gao (2006) said different cultures have different culturally determined conventions of what they think is the appropriate way of communicating. In this research, the Ghanaian and Nigerian students in the hostel said it is considered impolite in their cultures to give, receive or point at something with the left hand. The other participants however said they use the left hand freely because they do not have any cultural rule against it. Whereas the Ghanaian and Nigerian students are shocked about the other students' indifference towards the use of the left hand, the American students are equally shocked that certain cultures do not encourage the use of the left hand.

5.2.4 Eye contact

According to Gao (2006), the use of eye contact differs according to cultures. In the Ghanaian and Nigerian culture, it is disrespectful to look into an elderly person's eye when talking. Hence to them, maintaining eye contact is rude and uncomfortable. The American students, on the other hand were brought up to look straight into people's eyes when talking. To the American students, failure to maintain eye contact is considered as showing lack of interest or dishonesty. The Francophone African students, even though they do not use much eye contact, did not give any cultural reason for that. The European participants had varied attitudes to the use of eye contact. The Norwegian and Swedish participants said they use a lot of eye contact but the other European participants said they do not.

5.2.5 Reaction to time

Whereas American and European students are punctual and feel disrespected when one is late, most of the African students said they are not punctual and so do not complain much when

others are late for appointments. The Africans rarely attend meetings on time because they expect everyone else to be late. The European and American students are also gradually adjusting to the habit of lateness – what they have learnt is called “Ghana Man’s Time”.

5.2.6 Use of space and touching

According to Gamble and Gamble (2010), people’s attitude towards touching and space differs according to culture. France, Saudi Arabia and Italy are examples of countries that promote displays of warmth and closeness during conversations. They tend to stand close to each other when communicating, seek maximum sensory experiences, and touch frequently. However, members from low contact cultures, such as Germany, Scandinavia, England and Germany discourage such behaviour. Saudi Arabia, France, and Italy are countries with contact cultures; people in their society enjoy the intimacy of contact during conversations (Gamble and Gamble, 2010). Beaulieu (2004) also confirmed the differences in the use of space among cultures during conversations.

In contrast, this study found out that most of the students, irrespective of their culture, do not encourage strangers to get into their personal space or touch them during conversations. This, according to the participants is more of a general human attitude which is not subject to cultural differences. To some participants, it is more tolerable and less threatening if the stranger standing close or touching them is decent. Participants’ reaction to a stranger’s touch also depends on where the person touches and how long the touch lasts.

Beaulieu (2004) also found out that female-female interactions were closer than male-female interactions. This study, however, derived varied responses, regarding whether participants preferred being close or touched by people of the same of sex. Whereas some of the participants preferred to be closer or touched by members of the same sex, others were more comfortable with members of the opposite sex. These responses were not dependent on the participants' cultural background but rather individual preferences.

5.2.7 Greetings

There were types of greetings that are known and used by all students. Examples are casual greetings such as “hello”, and “hi”. Certain greeting gestures were however peculiar to particular cultures. For example, European and Francophone African ladies greet one another with kisses on the cheek and American male students greet friends with their fists.

The study also discovered different attitudes towards greeting, just as suggested by Gao (2006). Whereas Ghanaian and Nigerian students consider it important to greet people in places like restaurants, shops and class, American students think otherwise. The Francophone students also did not seem to care much about greeting.

5.3 Communication challenges the students face

Just as Ko (2008) found out that differing language of students and teachers have the greatest influence on intercultural communication, this study found out that one of the key communication challenges the students faced was the language barrier existing among the various cultures in the Hostel. Because of the differences in accents, the participants said they find it hard to make out some words when people from other cultures speak. Hence the students tend to remain in their own cultural groups and are hesitant to mingle with students from other

cultural groups. For instance, the Francophone African students prefer to mingle more with others who do not have English as their first language because they complained the Anglophones mock their accent.

Some of the non-Anglophone participants, the Francophone African students especially, have problems with finding the right words or expressions in English language and this has affected their conversation in English. They mentioned the issue of “faux amis” (French words that look and sound similar to English words but differ in meanings) that causes them to mistranslate French words into English.

Their difficulty in expressing themselves fluently in English and their accents often attracted mockery from the Ghanaian students. Most of the Francophone African students said they had decided not to speak much English around Anglophones to avoid such mockery. This is consistent with Kijima’s (2005) study, which found out that the language barrier hindered the Japanese students’ ability to communicate well and make friends during their stay in Australia.

Also, Yashima et al (2000), suggested that a student’s self confidence in a second language determines his or her willingness to communicate in that language. This confidence and willingness to communicate is usually boosted by the members of the host country. However, in this study, the Francophone African students’ confidence to communicate in English is undermined through mockery by Ghanaian students.

There were also instances of cultural misunderstandings among the students. One example is the avoidance of the use of the left hand by the Ghanaian and Nigerian students which the other students found puzzling.

Also, a Nigerian participant mentioned the fact that her Ghanaian friend understood her joke but her American roommate did not. The Ghanaian understood her friend's African joke but the American student probably did not understand because she did not know much about the African context in which the joke was told. This is a reflection of Samovar and Porter's (1997) intercultural communication model's suggestion that the greater the difference between cultures, the more likely the message intended is misunderstood. Ghanaians and Nigerians seem to have certain cultural values in common so they understand one another better.

It is also interesting to note that the students from nationalities that have similar communication problems tend to stick together and interact with one another more. For instance, Francophone Africans interact more with one another; the Czech and Norwegian participants also said they are more comfortable interacting with one another because they are all do not speak English fluently.

5.4 How challenges are resolved

The study found out that in instances when the students do not understand one another due to cultural differences, they clarify, explain and repeat themselves until they are understood.

They also use gestures to express themselves better in instances of verbal misunderstandings.

This reflects the importance Kelley (2007) and Church et al. (2004) placed on the use of gestures in communication. It is also interesting to note that a Korean student in the hostel uses a translator on his tablet to communicate with the other students in the hostel because he does not speak much English.

According to the Intercultural Communication Model, a person's communication pattern is not only influenced by his or her culture but by other external factors too. The study found out that some students in the Hostel try to adjust the way they talk so that other students will understand

them better. A case in point is the Locally Acquired Foreign Accent (LAFA) that certain Ghanaian students are noted to have adopted.

Likewise, even though American, European and francophone African students are indifferent towards the use of the left hand, they have learnt not to use it often, especially in the classroom, as it is considered impolite in a Ghanaian setting.

5.5 Conclusion

The study found certain significant similarities and differences in the communication patterns among the various cultures represented in the International Students' Hostel. Gestures such as the “thumbs up” and “middle finger” signs were found to mean the same to most participants. Other gestures, however meant differently according to cultures. The use of other nonverbal cues such as eye contact, time and greetings differed among cultures. All participants, however, had a similar attitude toward touching and the use of distance during conversations.

The study also found out that cultural differences do not only exist among people who communicate in different languages but also among people who speak the same language too. Participants resolved their communication challenges by using gestures, repeating themselves until they are understood and adjusting their communication patterns to suit others. The study also found out that technology also helps dissolve language barriers.

The intercultural communication model posits that each cultural group has its individual rules and preferences for interaction and when these rules and preferences are unfamiliar, individuals are likely to misinterpret the meaning of the message (Samovar and Porter, 1997). The International Students' Hostel has students from diverse cultural backgrounds and their differences in communication patterns led to challenges during interactions with one another.

The challenges, however, were not so severe to have led to any significant conflicts among the students.

5.6 Limitations of study

The study had the following limitations:

First, it was difficult to get willing students from the International Students' Hostel to take part in the study. Most of the students could not take part in the study because they were not comfortable talking about their experiences.

There was also a language barrier between the researcher and some of the non-anglophone students at the International Students' Hostel. The research initially intended to include a focus group discussion with Asian students in the Hostel, as they reflect a different culture from the others. However, Asian students were not included in the study because majority of them could not express themselves well enough in the English language. A few francophone African students also declined taking part in the study because they felt they could not express themselves well enough in the English language.

Also, the International Students' Hostel could not provide detailed records on the exact number of students in the Hostel and their nationalities. The research was thus based on an estimation of the number of students.

Finally, since the study depended solely on a qualitative method of data collection, its findings cannot be generalized. However, the findings of this study are indicative of patterns in intercultural communication that have been found in other studies and therefore useful addition to literature on communication among cultures.

5.7 Recommendations

The non-Anglophone students who are not fluent in the English Language take a year's course in English Proficiency in the University of Ghana before they start their normal courses. Since nonverbal cues are as important as the verbal form of communication, it is recommended to incorporate teaching of nonverbal cues in the English language classes, just as suggested by Shi and Fan (2010).

Since most Asian students find it difficult speaking fluent English even after the one year English Proficiency course offered in the University of Ghana, it is also recommended that Asian students are given more intensive English courses before and during their stay at the University of Ghana.

Proper record keeping of the students' information in the Hostel is also recommended to make future research on the Hostel easier and more credible.

More research could be conducted to investigate other areas of intercultural communication this study could not cover, such as cross-cultural adaptation among students, gender differences in communication and generational differences in communication.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A (Screener questions)

1. I am conducting a study on communication among students in a multicultural setting for my M.A. dissertation. Would you like to be a participant of a group discussion for this study?
2. Do you speak English?
3. Are you a student of the University of Ghana?
4. Are you a resident of the International Students' Hostel?
5. Which country are you from?

Appendix B (Question guide for discussion)

1. Please tell us your name and the country you come from.
2. What major observations have you made about the differences in communication styles among the different cultures in the hostel (in terms of language, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, touching, the use of space and time)?
3. What impression do you have of others when they
 - stand closer/ less closer to others than you usually would during conversations
 - touch others more/less during conversations
 - use more/less gestures than you do when talking
 - have different attitudes towards the use of time
4. Do you face any difficulty while communicating with someone from another culture?
5. What challenges do you face when communicating with people from other cultures
6. Cite instances
7. What have you observed are some similarities in communication patterns among the various cultures?
8. Do you always understand what people from different countries say?
9. Have there been instances when someone has misinterpreted something you have said?
10. Cite instances
11. Do you misinterpret what other people say?
12. Cite instances
13. Have you ever made a gesture that has been misinterpreted by someone else from another country?
14. Do these misunderstandings/misinterpretations lead to conflict?

15. How do you deal with these challenges