



Barriers in Intercultural Communication: A Study from the Perspective of English Major Students

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ABSTRACT:

Intercultural communication plays a very important role in the era of international integration. However, the process of communication between different cultures has created many problems, even conflicts. Therefore, barriers in intercultural communication have received much attention from researchers and scholars. This article will research barriers to cross-cultural communication from the perceptions of English major students, point out problems arising from cross-cultural communication barriers, and offer some strategies to improve the effectiveness of intercultural communication. The results indicate that participants highly agree with views on intercultural barriers such as: Cultural knowledge, Language, Nationalism, Uncertainty; Mold; Prejudice; and Discrimination. Barriers have caused a number of problems that affect the effectiveness of Intercultural Communication. Some solutions to improve the effectiveness of intercultural communication have been recognized such as: raising cultural awareness, changing attitudes in a positive way in communication, improving cross-cultural and positive communication skills.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, barriers, culture, intercultural communication competency, EFL students

1. Introduction

With the development of globalization, the distance between countries is gradually shortening, people have come closer together in a global scope. However, communication barriers in cultural diversity have been creating great challenges. The process of communication between many cultures has given rise to many problems, even conflicts.

It can be said that intercultural communication capacity plays a huge role in all fields, from economics, politics, society, etc. to science and education. Improving intercultural communication competence has become a matter of concern for scientists, educational practitioners, and learners. Educational institutions have introduced subjects related to foreign cultures into some majors. In the English major at the University, Intercultural Communication has been taught as a subject in the training program to meet one of the goals of the English language major's output standards. Students have just been fully equipped with linguistic knowledge, skills, and practices, including the ability to communicate in general and communicate from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds in particular.

Therefore, English learners need to pay much attention to grasping and improving intercultural communication skills. According to Tran and Seepho (2015), intercultural communication is one of the most important skills for people in the 21st century to survive in the context of cross-cultural communication. To develop this skill and achieve the goal of becoming an effective intercultural speaker and communicator, learners are required to participate in a multicultural community. However, effective intercultural communication is a skill that few people have and not many can even achieve the goal because there are certain cultural barriers Romberg (2011). Some scientists have pointed out barriers in intercultural communication such as "anxiety", "assume sameness instead of difference", "nationalism", "stereotypes" and "prejudice", "verbal and non-verbal communication" (Boaca, 2017; Hybels & Weaver, 2009; LaRay Barna, 1997; Miressa & Dumessa, 2016). However, these studies are only a synthesis of theories about Intercultural Communication barriers. This article, with a comprehensive research method, aims to review barriers in intercultural communication from students' perceptions and their actual experiences. From there, we point out the problems arising from these obstacles, and propose some solutions to overcome and improve the effectiveness of intercultural communication. The author focuses on the following research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of barriers to intercultural communication?
2. What problems do these barriers create in intercultural communication?
3. What solutions should be proposed to overcome difficulties and improve intercultural communication effectiveness?

2. Literature review

2.1. Intercultural communication

In a similar vein, Byram (2000) identified proper understanding, awareness, and attitudes toward our own culture and that of other cultures as the hallmarks of Intercultural Communication. chemistry (Byram, 2000). Chao (2014) described Intercultural Communication as the most influential factor in foreign language adoption, in which communicators effectively perform communicative acts to negotiate in an environment. culturally diverse. Meanwhile, Crahay (2005) defines intercultural communication competency simply, as an integrated network of knowledge components, which can be activated to complete tasks.

With the goal of guiding globally integrated education, intercultural competence has been widely popularized in foreign language classrooms (Liaw, 2006, Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Therefore, many models of intercultural communication competence have been recommended for teaching to foster intercultural communication competence for students (Deardorff, 2006; Spitzberg, 2000; Stier, 2006). In a study of the intercultural functioning of teams, Schneider and Romberg (2011) proposed a three-stage intercultural model that includes three elements: intercultural awareness (not just full understanding intercultural understanding but also the ability to accept different cultures), a common performance system (a set of commonly accepted behaviors), and cross-cultural communication (effective communication skills). results in specific intercultural situations). Meanwhile, Garson (2016) proposed a model of cross-cultural communication skills with the ability and function to understand other intercultural perspectives, the ability to adapt one's own behavior, the ability to resolving conflicts in communication, the ability to recognize rights to different values and behavioral norms (Byram et al., 2002). These factors, together with the ability to tolerate communication, provide the basis for career development, preparation for better living conditions, achievement, and opportunities for professional self-realization (Liu et al., 2015).

2.2. Barriers to intercultural communication

There are many ways to identify barriers in Intercultural Communication. From a cultural perspective, Hybels & Weaver (2009) suggest that there are four barriers to intercultural communication, including nationalism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, related to forming beliefs or judgments about another culture. These obstacles have made it difficult to communicate effectively across cultures.

Nationalism

This refers to the belief that one's own culture is better than others. Ethnocentric attitudes are exemplified when people judge others based on their own or their ethnic cultural beliefs and practices. The degree of negativity involves the belief that one's own culture is superior and that the behavior of others must be judged through one's cultural standards. In addition, it also manifests itself in imposing one person's cultural beliefs on others. Nationalism is encouraged when the education system only teaches the culture of a particular country and ignores other cultures.

Mold

This is a general cognitive classification of a representative that belongs to a particular group of people depending on one's observations and experiences in interacting with members of that group. Negative stereotypical thoughts are common and are often passed down from generation to generation. Stereotypes can also be positive or negative. In issues related to culture, stereotypes are understood in the second sense.

Prejudice

This is a term that refers to negative attitudes held toward individuals of a particular race, social class, religion, or other groups of people. Prejudice can cause a person to feel fear or resentment toward someone who belongs to a particular group.

Discrimination

This refers to negative behaviors caused by prejudice or stereotypes. It can be interpersonal, such as when a person refuses to speak to people of a certain race or group, such as denying a group of people certain rights in society. Other forms of discrimination include verbal insults, avoidance, physical violence, and genocide.

LaRay M. Barna (1997) has developed an approach to examining barriers to intercultural communication at a general level. The author developed six barriers: "anxiety, assuming sameness over difference, nationalism, stereotyping and prejudice, nonverbal communication, and language." These types of barriers have been used when discussing issues that may arise in intercultural encounters. Miressa.M & Dumessa. M (2016) illustrate that linguistics, stereotypes, ethnocentrism, previous historical context and socio-cultural variations are barriers to diverse communication culture among students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds

Boaca. M (2017) lists some of the key obstacles identified in Laray M. Barna (1994), including the assumption that we act and react in similar ways regardless of the culture to which we belong. , lack of understanding of nonverbal behavior, inability to communicate because of lack of verbal communication, perception of culture at a stereotypical level, tendency to judge cultural behaviors, and high levels of stress associated with regarding encounters between cultures. Zhijing Chen (2009) investigated whether cultural differences become barriers to communication in certain situations and whether strategies are effective for overcoming such barriers. These studies focus mainly on barriers, without consideration of issues arising from barriers to effective communication and methods of improving intercultural competence in the university environment.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study uses mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods to investigate barriers to cross-cultural communication, problems, and solutions. Research and interviews with students majoring in Foreign Languages at a university in Hanoi. Participants answered the questionnaire in a Google form link attached to an email or social network sent by the researcher.

3.2. Participants

The participants selected are English major students who had just completed an Intercultural Communication course. There were a total of 54 people participating in the study, of which 40 were female students (74.1 %) and 14 males (25.9%). Their ages range from 21 to 23. These students have completed language skills courses such as grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing and are studying specialized subjects. They have just participated in the intercultural communication course in the 2nd semester of the 2022-2023 school year. Students must previously complete the English-American literature course to continue taking this course.

3.3. Data collection

Questionnaires and interviews were applied to collect data. The content of the questionnaire was designed by the researcher with previous studies in mind, as well as the goals of the current study. The questionnaire includes questions designed based on the classification of Hybels & Weaver (2009) and LaRay M. Barna (1997), divided into 3 parts:

- Part 1: Basic information;
- Part 2: Evaluation of English majors on barriers in intercultural communication;
- Part 3: Students' assessment of problems arising from barriers in intercultural communication.

The questionnaire included opinion-based questions aimed at determining how participants perceived the statements made in the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes 5 options based on Likert 5-level scales: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly agree or very low; low, neutral; High; and very high.

Interview: The writer asked 30 students quick interview questions about what problems and solutions should be proposed to overcome difficulties and improve intercultural communication effectiveness.

3.4. Data analysis

The main data analysis method in the study is quantitative method through the use of questionnaires and qualitative method from interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed with the support of descriptive statistics software SPSS 25.0. Participants' demographic information was analyzed based on a descriptive frequency analysis. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to explore the satisfactory reliability of the dependent variables. The average Cronbach's alpha value of the variables in the questionnaire is > 0.7 . The mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the first and second research questions. Qualitative data in the interviews for the third research question were analyzed based on the "Auto-Coding" technique.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Barriers to cross-cultural communication

Table 1. Students' assessments of barriers to intercultural communication

	Participants	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Knowledge of cultural differences	54	2	5	3,65	,828
Language (speech and body language)	54	3	5	4,06	,712
Assumption of similarities rather than differences in culture	54	2	5	3,48	,841
Nationalism	54	2	5	3,26	,994
Anxiety and uncertainty	54	2	5	3,61	,899
Mold	54	2	5	3,80	,810
Prejudice	54	2	5	3,72	,878
Discrimination	54	2	5	3,65	,894

It can be seen from table 1 that students rated the barriers to cross-cultural communication as relatively high to very high (mean >3.2), and quite homogeneous (SD from 0.7 to 0.8). Among them, "language" is considered the biggest obstacle with the highest mean of 4.06 while "Nationalism" is

considered the smallest obstacle to intercultural communication with a mean score of 4.06. average is 3.26. The next highest rankings in the table are "Mold", "Prejudice" with mean 3.80 and 3.72 respectively. Meanwhile, "Discrimination" and "Knowledge about cultural differences" both received high ratings with an average score of 3.65. Thus, this conclusion is consistent with the research results of Zheng Jin (2009), Boaca. M (2017), Miressa.M & Dumessa.M (2016) pointed out that language issues and cultural differences are the main barriers to intercultural communication. Cultural awareness at the stereotypical level and the tendency to judge cultural behaviors are barriers to cross-cultural communication. Besides, prejudice and nationalism are obstacles to communication between cultures. This study demonstrates that racism, prejudice, nationalism, and stereotyping are cross-cultural communication challenges.

4.2. Problems arise from intercultural communication barriers

Table 2. Students' perceptions of problems arising from intercultural communication barriers

Problems	Participants	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Communication awkwardness	54	3	5	4,44	,604
Misunderstanding of communication content	54	3	5	3,83	,771
Giving inappropriate feedback	54	3	5	3,87	,702
Ending without achieving goals	54	3	5	4,06	,834
Dissatisfaction	54	3	5	3,89	,769
Anger	54	3	5	3,80	,786
Speech conflicts	54	3	5	3,61	,656
Behavioral conflicts	54	2	5	3,39	,763

The data in Table 2 indicate that participants had high and very high agreement on the problems arising from intercultural communication barriers with average values mainly above 3.5 and $0.6 < SD < 0.8$. The effectiveness of communication is affected by barriers, which is most clearly shown in the problem "Communication awkwardness" with mean=4.44 and $SD=0.604$, while "behavioral conflict" and "Speech conflict" was rated at the last level with means of 3.39 and 3.61, respectively. Issues related to communication effectiveness are also rated quite high at a high level of over 3.8 including "Misunderstanding of communication content", "Giving inappropriate feedback", and "Ending without achieving goals". communication destination". Attitude-related problems such as "Dissatisfaction" and "Anger" were recorded at high levels with means of 3.89 and 3.80, respectively.

So it can be seen that communication barriers have caused a number of problems in communication effectiveness, from low to high levels. These problems can reduce communication effectiveness, or even fail and lead to conflicts. This result is consistent with the research of authors such as Jackson (2018); Chao (2014); and Stier (2006).

4.3. Solutions needed to overcome difficulties and improve intercultural communication effectiveness

Through interviews with students, the author has compiled suggested solutions to enhance the effectiveness of intercultural communication in basic aspects such as: improving knowledge about cultures, constantly cultivating Developing awareness and communication skills in a multicultural environment, practicing intercultural communication in multicultural communities, enhancing the ability to solve intercultural situations. Learners should actively research and accumulate cultural knowledge of different countries, especially English-speaking countries. Accumulating knowledge should be based on books, reference materials, and actively communicating with people from different countries to learn about differences in national culture. Cultural competitions, exams, and contests with the purpose of learning about the culture of different countries should be organized annually or during the school curriculum to enhance cultural knowledge and problem-solving ability for learners. Students should actively participate in cultural activities or international cultural exchanges through social networks, establishing multicultural projects or communities for learning exchanges. Dramatic forms should be applied in the curriculum to consolidate theory and practice. Cultural and extracurricular talks, debates, seminars, and discussions between students and students and students and experts should be increased.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The article clarifies the barriers in Intercultural Communication: Cultural Knowledge, Language, Nationalism, Uncertainty; Mold; Prejudice; and Discrimination. Barriers have caused problems such as awkwardness in communication; Misunderstanding of communication content; There is inappropriate feedback; Ends when the communication purpose has not been achieved; Unsatisfied; Angry; Conflict over words; Behavioral conflicts. Some solutions to improve the effectiveness of intercultural communication have been recognized such as: raising cultural awareness, changing attitudes in a positive way in communication, improving cross-cultural and positive communication skills. Participate in activities related to foreign culture.

Teachers and learners should have positive attitudes in learning, teaching, and practicing intercultural communication. Schools should have policies to support teachers and learners with opportunities to participate in cultural activities at foreign schools and cultural organizations, and organize extracurricular activities to improve knowledge and capacity. Intercultural communication.

The article still has some limitations such as the research sample is not large enough to be able to generalize into a general and extensive result. Hopefully the following studies will have wide-ranging studies, and in-depth studies related to each specific barrier or solution./.

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