

EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAINING STUDENTS ON INTER CULTURAL COMMUNICATION FOR GLOBAL FITMENT AT WORKPLACE-A PILOT STUDY!!!

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ABSTRACT- *Inter Cultural Communication is an emerging area of research. With the fast pacing technological advancement and sporadic business across the world-there is a lot of mingling between people from different culture. The business world has taken a new shape and form in which cross cultural teams working with each other has highly increased. The way of doing business globally is transitioning, and there is a need for the new workforce entering global markets for employment to be trained on the same. The skill set required to do business in today's world is different and is ever changing. The new workforce therefore needs to be trained on these emerging skill sets so that they can not only gain employment but also sustain it. This paper discusses the importance of training the emerging workforce (professional students) on importance of inter cultural communication, and have productive conversations with the diverse customers and stakeholders from across culture in their employment. In order to highlight the effectiveness of training students while they are in their education years-the researcher worked with a sample of 100 final year engineering and MBA students of a technical university based out of Delhi-NCR. These students were trained on improving upon their inter cultural communication with Japanese customers for future employments- by using different activities as a part of an intervention process. The intervention process used training material, activities and video based learning related to effective inter cultural communication with Japanese customers. A pre-and posttest method was used for a group of 100 students, and their improvement scores were measured. The findings of the study highlight a marked improvement in the post-test scores of the groups which indicates effectiveness of the training intervention used. This paper recommends imparting focused training to professional students studying in engineering and MBA schools on intercultural communication strategies to aid in improving communicating with stakeholders across culture thereby enhancing their workplace communication.*

Keywords- *Inter cultural communication, Handling Japanese customer communication, Customer interaction, Cross cultural communication, Cultural competence.*

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I INTRODUCTION TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Fantini (2006) describes the intercultural communication as the ability/abilities used to communicate effectively and appropriately with others who are culturally and linguistically different from each other. It is a study that talks about how people from different cultures communicate in similar and different ways among themselves to reach effective outcomes in their communication. It is also emphasizing on the fact that in order to be successful at communicating across culture, one has to be flexible and accommodating to the different value systems, beliefs and practices of the other culture, and also be open to change their own. What this means is that people should constantly be involved in negotiating and renegotiating one's beliefs, norms and values while interacting with people from diverse cultures.

In the light of the fact that there has been a huge increase in countries globally- involved with each other in global transactions and business dealing, it is of critical importance to think seriously about the gaps in understanding global business etiquette and ways of communication. As Yang (2002) explains it as, "internationalization means the awareness and operation of interactions within and between cultures through its teaching, research and service functions, with the ultimate aim of achieving mutual understanding across cultural borders".

Studies highlight that without focused training of intercultural communication there will be barriers and limitations for the workforce when they travel to a foreign territory. This may cause confusion and misunderstandings and their business conversations may get impacted negatively. Chaney and Martin (2007) discuss on the importance of training International Business etiquette for all workforce engaged in doing business globally. According to them training is needed both in the context of a social setting and also in international business situations. Factors like exchanging business cards, introducing oneself, dining etiquette, understanding of Internationally used "English" language, negotiating style and hierarchy are all important to realize and get trained upon. Chaney and his colleague assert that in a scenario where one talks with a customer or a colleague from other cultures in a business context, it is important to understand about their customs and etiquette in order to avoid unintentionally offending them. Therefore, when stepping into foreign grounds it is vital to fully understand the cultural differences that exists to prevent damaging relationships resulting from intercultural communication gaps.

With the business going global increasingly, it is a demand of the hour that more and more employees travel or deal across cultures to discuss and make new business deals. This will therefore require them to communicate effectively with their foreign customers and colleagues to take opportunity of the global market available now. Martin (2007) explains that with business now thinking globally, and involved in regular import ,export and producing goods set for global use- it is important to pay a lot of attention on how people communicate across cultures and learn effective ways to continually improve upon their understanding of the outside world. In the same context Bovee and Thill (2010) discuss on importance of training the present and the emerging workforce on effective cross-cultural understanding and communication etiquette. They say that the result of training will directly impact on the businesses beginning to appreciate and respect the cultural differences between each other, and develop better understanding of people from different worlds. It will certainly educate them on how they should act while conducting business.

Carte & Fox (2008) discuss on the effectiveness on getting trained on “Global Business Etiquette” which is slowly emerging as more and more countries and cultures begin to do business with each other. This mingling of cultures and behavior along with business etiquette is slowly graduating into one global business etiquette norm which should be followed. And this can happen once we begin to train our workforce accordingly to make them globally fit to survive in this diverse world. This is a very exciting phase today and this element needs focused attention and intervention.

This paper is an attempt to discuss the importance of inter cultural communication training proposed to be provided to the professional management and engineering students and was carried with the below hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS:

H1: Inter cultural communication is a key language skill required for handling global business.

H2: Specific training provided on handling inter cultural communication to new and emerging workforce (professional students) can prepare them for better employment.

The researcher has taken Japanese customer as an example and built some task based activities as a part of a one day training workshop- which sensitizes and prepares students on handling cultural diversity at workplace specific to a Japanese customer.

The author used these tasks based activities as an intervention to a group of management and engineering final year graduate students from engineering and MBA schools situated of a Technical state university based in Delhi NCR region.

II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

CULTURE

Kohler (2003:45) describes the term culture as a” complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviors, practices, rituals and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institutions they create”.

The concept of culture is a variable concept. It is a complex phenomenon, as it manifests itself both in language patterns, thoughts and behavior. And these patterns are found to be different for different ethnic groups from diverse geographical environments and beliefs.

In this context, it is important to note a very important study popular as the”. The Iceberg of Culture” proposed by Hall in the year 1976. This theory is supposedly an astute analogy of culture. Hall described the culture of a society by depicting it through an iceberg phenomenon. For example, if one asks a question on showing an iceberg to a set of audience and asks -How much of an iceberg one sees? Hall explained, that only 1/4th part of an iceberg is visible, above the water and the bigger 3/4th portion is hidden under water. He applied this iceberg phenomenon to human beings and their culture, and explained that the external part of culture (1/4th portion) is what is visible just like the tip of the iceberg. Hall explained this 1/4th portion as one’s knowledge, skills and external behaviors which is visible to others. The other submerged portion i.e the 3/4th part of a personality is buried inside the depth of one’s culture which includes one’s beliefs, values, thoughts patterns that impact one’s external behavior. This model teaches us that one cannot judge any new culture based only on what is visible externally. We must take the time to get to know individuals from that culture and interact with them. His 10% which is visible to us is no

indication of the real story behind a person's external behavior and attitudes. His 90% is what is hidden and that can be realized and understood by making a conscious attempt to diagnose the world of the other person. By doing so can we uncover the values and beliefs that underlie the behavior of that society. Kramsch (1998) describes culture as "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings". Culture has also been described by several authors. Brown (2000) has described culture as "the ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time". Therefore, one needs to understand all of these skills and factors in others as one approaches better communication with diverse audience.

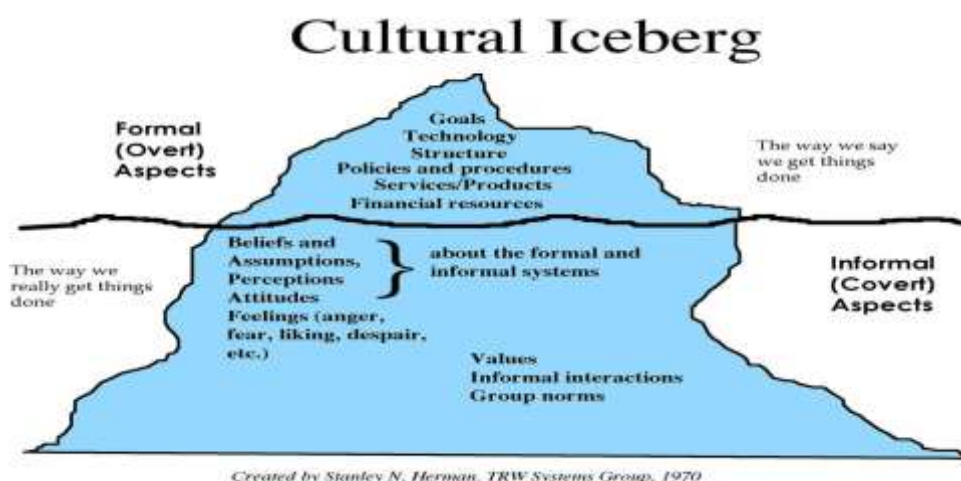


Figure 1: Source: Stanley, N.Hermen (1970)

Tomalin (2008) has emphasized on "Culture" to be considered as the "fifth language skill", in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities in communication. He is of the opinion that the teaching of culture should include "cultural knowledge" i.e knowledge of the broad culture, "cultural values" i.e the psyche of the country, "cultural behavior" which is knowledge of routines and behavior, along with cultural skills in order to develop intercultural sensitivity and awareness for others.

Therefore, culture can be described as a shared set of basic assumptions, values, and attitudes, beliefs which manifest themselves in systems and institutions as well as behavioral and non-behavioral patterns. These levels to culture i.e the easily observable outer layers (such as behavioral conventions) and the increasingly more difficult to grasp inner layers (such as assumptions and values) indicate that the culture is not inheritable or genetic, but learned. Although all members of a society share their culture, expressions of culture-resultant behavior are modified by the individuals' personality.

III INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION (IC) COMPETENCE

Studies across widely recognize that language is used as a primary channel through which culture is communicated. Regardless of different opinions, study of culture has taken an important place in foreign language teaching and learning. (Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1989; Liddicoat, 2002, Liddicoat & Scarino, 2003). To understand the nuance of intercultural communication, it is necessary to consider the concept of culture in the right context.

Communication effectively entails interacting with people using verbal, written and nonverbal methods. And so, it is useful to understand that effective communication between two people is completely based on if they are at the same page culturally. Moreover, the several literatures on culture is useful but generally does not lead to learners' insight; whereas the development of people's cultural awareness leads to a better critical thinking.

According to Byram (1997) an intercultural competent (ICC) speaker is one with an ability to transform the "intercultural encounters" into relationship. This speaker has an innate will to understand the other cultures by trying to gain an inside view and also share his inside view and beliefs on one's own culture. That is when the language skills links to the intercultural competency in a person who is optimally ready to participate in this global world.

In this context, there is a very important insight presented by Hall (2000). He discusses the importance of "context" in explaining communication differences" Context is the information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event". And so, the elements "event and culture" both combine to produce a meaning to any piece of communication depending on the proportion dependent on one's culture. Therefore, culture can also be explained as being "High context or Low context" in nature and impacts the disposition of one's communication. For example, Americans and Germans represent a low context (LC) culture which affects their communication and behavior. Being from the LC they are found to have short lived relationships and so are always straight forward and direct in their communication in business. And so, they insist on having detailed information in business meetings and discussions. On the other hand, the Japanese, Chinese and Asians are groups representing high context culture (HC) and are reserved and do not engage in straight forward communication. They believe in establishing long lasting relationships in business.

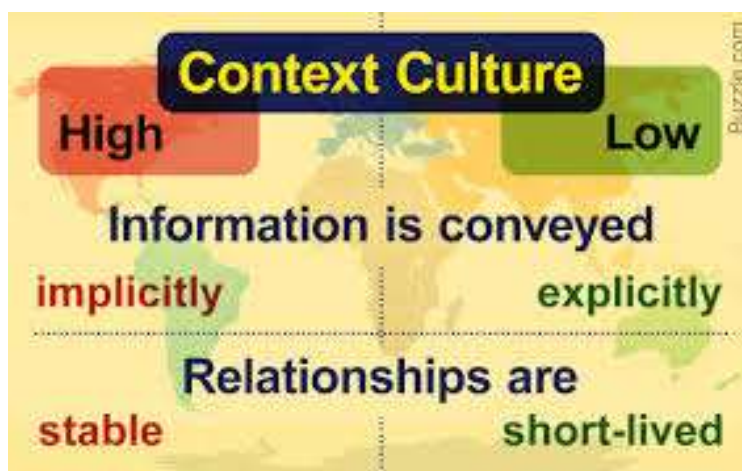


Figure 2: Source: www.buzzle.com

Bean (2008) calls the intercultural competency – "a generic skillset" which is necessary to build a culturally competent workforce. Many studies viz. Bennett (2011); Ippolito (2007); Ward (2004) and Landis & Bhawuk (2004), stress on the importance of intercultural training in higher education as it is required to train the workforce on skills necessary for operating in the diverse world. Saks and Burke (2012) explain, "training is considered to be a strategic human resource practice that can benefit individuals, teams, organizations and society".

The literature review supports the thought that in order to communicate effectively with another culture empathy and identification with the principles of that culture is most required. Thus, whenever people of one culture want to communicate with others outside that culture, the need for understanding the issues of intercultural communication exist.

Thus, the importance of the IC competence is clear and understood. However, there was still a debate around the specific areas or concepts on which the training on this subject should be designed. In this context Nieto’s (1999) definition of culture as, “...the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people. . .” (p.48) is also difficult to identify the specific aspects of a culture that should be included in a classroom instruction. There are different models for Intercultural Competence that talk about difference themes to be included.

Table 1: Gist of four popular theories and factors for Intercultural Competence

Bennet’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)	Gudykunst’s (1993) Anxiety/ Uncertainty Management Model (AUM)	Byram’s (1997) Multidimensional Model of Intercultural Competence	Deardorff’s (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence
Focuses on internal evolution from ethnocentrism to ethno relativism	Discusses self-awareness as the key component in building bridges to other cultures	Specifically addresses the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to interact in intercultural situations successfully.	Emphasizes upon a continuous process of working on attitudes, knowledge, internal outcomes, and external outcomes related to intercultural competence

From the above theories Byram’s Multidimensional model of Intercultural Competence was a popular one and well adept. The Byram’s model factors in all the essential parameters to be included in training the new work force on IC. In the Byram’s Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997), the language teachers are guided to work upon three important parameters of ICC, and guide learners in acquiring understanding of “attitudes, knowledge, and skills” related to intercultural competence. Byram explains that building activities around these three parameters will help a learner understand the world of the “other” and the experience shall transform him. Teachers must lead students by engaging them in activities for understanding the attitude, knowledge and skills of

the other person. Important steps in training would be guiding learners on how to ask open ended questions, use probing and clarifying to gain information about the other. Byram(1997)

The students should be allowed to discover the “other” world to build a relationship of reciprocity. It is important to realize that mere training on the learning the idioms and vocabulary of other cultures is not enough for a learner to adapt with” others”. What is needed for learners is to understand how and why the “other” thinks and that can happen when one understands their beliefs and value systems. For example, Russians representing the Low Context Culture are a group where “Smile” is used as a separate function which should not be used so easily. So, Russians will not smile when they attend business meetings and negotiate. This gesture could be taken by someone who is alien to Russian beliefs and may end up labelling Russians as cold and insensitive people – and that is really not true. Thus, understanding beliefs and value system of the” other” in the context of their culture is an important factor to be trained upon. Byram (1997)

JAPANESE BUSINESS MANNERS: There are a couple of studies which detail out Japanese business manners very intricately. According to Bovee and Thill (2010) the business manners in Japan emerges from the high context culture like any other Asian country. Japanese are highly respectful and bonded to their culture and respect clients who respect their culture. They emphasize more on the non- verbal communication and expressing through it rather than making direct communication. They will not engage in direct communication with others.” Between the line” interpretation is a common practice there and Japanese make very good use of hand movements to say “No” as they are not trained to directly say “No” to anything. For instance, if during a business deal a Japanese has to say “No”-he will use a sentence like-” This is difficult for us.” which is a very indirect communication. An American who is a direct communicator may take this response as a hopeful one, and may still keep working to materialize the business deal. Such barriers play out highly in the business world all around. Martin and Chaney (2012). Also given the Japanese are from the high context culture they tend to be implicit in their communication. They expect their business counterparts to understand them by reading between the lines, take cues from non -verbal gestures and also understand their beliefs and cultural values. Brett (2007)

According to Carte & Fox (2008) the Japanese believe in making long term relationships with their business counterparts and thus spend a lot of time in understanding about their values, organization’s vision, objectives etc. so that they are able to develop trust. Therefore, a large portion and time of initial meetings is just spent in trying to know more that discuss ahead. The Japanese truly believe in having long term associations with their business partners and this is a great value to understand before one begins to interact with the them.

Basis the Byram’s model of Inter cultural competence and literature review, the researcher developed a one day workshop on building Intercultural Communication Competence in professional students who are the new workforce aspiring for employment. This workshop was aimed at sensitizing the learners on the Japanese business etiquette and culture. The objective was to train the students in this workshop and measure their improvement in learning by using a pre- and posttest method.

IV RESEARCH METHOD

Instrument of Study: A pre- test was given to all students before they begin with the workshop. The pre- test was built using 15 items or questions meant to test knowledge on the Business culture in Japan. The 15 items were built

on variables Cultural context sensitivity (Item 1,2,4,5), Components of culture (Item 3), Japanese business manner (Items 6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15). These items were built keeping in view the deliberations of several researchers quoted in the literature review done on the subject by the researcher. Bovee and Thill (2010), Martin and Chaney (2012), Brett (2007), Carte & Fox (2008).The questionnaire items had multiple response questions which meant there could be more than one right answer to any item. (appendix I)

RELIABILITY and VALIDITY TEST: In order to test the Reliability of the pre-test questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha value was measured with a small score sample. The Cronbach alpha test is used to measure internal consistency between the different items in a test. The Cronbach value was found as 0.881 which is a highly acceptable value. The content validity was done by 3 professors of repute teaching Professional Communication at technical institutes in Delhi state.

Table 2: Calculation Cronbach's Value

Calculation of Cronabach Alpha inter cultural questionnaire	
Questions	15
Sum of item variances	10.71
Variance of total score	65.662
Cronbach Value	0.881

SAMPLE:

The researcher based his study at a technical university in Delhi state. The campus has both engineering and MBA students studying under the same campus. The researcher took permission from their departments and addressed the faculty members about the workshop and its objectives. A mix group of final year engineering and MBA students was taken as a sample for the training workshop. All of these students were comfortable in understanding English language and were enthusiastic to participate in the study. The sample group of 100 students consisted of 50 male and 50 female students respectively. The students were in the age group between 21 to 24 years from final year engineering batch and MBA batch respectively. The researcher shared some pre- read material like couple of blogs and research papers on importance of intercultural communication to all students so as to aware them about the subject two days before the workshop. On the day of the event all the students were grouped together in a seminar hall and a one day workshop was carried out with them. The workshop started at 9.30 am and ended at 6 pm. A brief of the activities carried out in the workshop are described below:

PROCEDURE: As the workshop began a pre-test questionnaire was administered to all 100 students for 30 minutes. Each question was of 5 marks, and the total aggregate scores for a student was done using prorated scoring method for all correct answers. A sum for all item response scores was calculated and each student had a pre-test score.

In the next phase, the training intervention was provided to all students using the activities and training content described below. Each activity was carried out with a clear objective and training material was used accordingly.

INTERVENTION:

Objective 1:

- To understand basics of culture and know High context culture (HCC) and Low context cultural (LCC) groups.
- Identify the HCC and LCC countries in business

Activity 1	Orientation on Culture
Task 1:	“Am I High Context or Low Context Culture”
Time:	45 mins
Instruction:	1) Guide students to watch the following video talking about importance of culture and difference between the high and the low context cultural groups (15 mins) 2) Divide the whole class into small teams of 10 each. The whole class will have 10 teams. 3) Assign a leader to each team. Make 10 chits with the names of their leaders on them. 4) Make a student pick up any four chits. These four teams take part in a group discussion activity between two groups each for 8 mins discussing what all they learnt. The rest teams listen to the group discussion and add if they can think of a new point. 5) At the end, the coach consolidates all points on culture and debriefs the class. This way all students understand the difference between each type of culture and the countries those represent these HC or LC cultural groups.

Objective:

- To understand the Business Etiquette in Japan
- To familiarize with Business manners
- To practice strategies to communicate effectively with Japanese customers

Activity 2:	Understanding Japanese Business Etiquette
Task 2:	“Know Japanese Business Culture”
Time:	45 mins
Instruction:	<p>1) Play the following videos to the class related to the Business culture in Japan. Ask students to note down the key points of Business manners in Japan.</p> <p>1) Video on Doing business with Japan: Cultural keys - Lilly Choi Lee https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ua5V59w2Oo</p> <p>2) https://youtu.be/JVQAF6Fbd_s</p> <p>3) https://youtu.be/hmdgP-YMXhg</p> <p>4) https://youtu.be/pkbXDkQJ-bE</p> <p>5) https://youtu.be/A8sBa-BGzwM</p> <p>6) https://youtu.be/LRcglNwDAC0</p> <p>2) Note the points discussed in videos and write a summary.</p>

Activity 3:	Role Plays
Task 3:	Make teams of two students each by randomly picking students. Put these Role play couple to the Role Play Activity on Business Manners in Japan.

Role Play Situations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Enact a Role Play situation between you and a Japanese customer where you are exchanging Business cards with each other.2) Enact a Role Play situation between you and Japanese customer where you are introducing yourself to each other.3) Enact a Role play situation between you and Japanese customer on seating yourself in a Japanese business room.4) Enact a Role play situation on how to handle a Japanese customer apologizing to you.5) Enact a Role play situation where you are presenting to the Japanese customer. <p>All the Role plays are scored by the trainer on Use of Business Manners, Language and Body Language and discussed with the students.</p>
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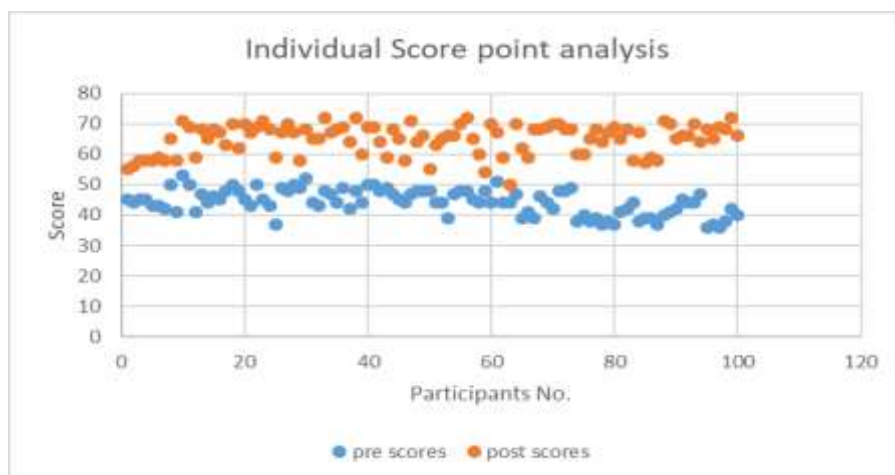
After the training intervention, a post -test of 30 minutes was administered to all 100 students and their responses measured. The observations on the post-test were calculated using MS Excel and T-test is described as following in the below section.

V ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

The objective of the training intervention was to measure the impact on the student sample and assess if there was a significant difference in their learning about the Japanese business manners. The researcher wanted to measure the following:

- 1) **Individual improvement score analysis:** The researcher calculated the pre- and the post-test scores for all 100 students and observed that each student has scored over 50 in the post-test. The highest improvement percentage went up to 92% for a student which is a marked improvement.

Table 3: Individual pre-and post-test scores



2) **Individual Gender Vice Improvement Score:** The researcher also measured the individual sum of scores for both the genders to evaluate how they fared in both the pre-and post-tests. This was calculated to understand if a particular gender scored better than the other.

Table 4: Gender Wise Individual Sum of Scores

Gender	Sum of pre scores	Sum of post scores
Female	2205	3284
Male	2221	3211
Grand Total	4426	6495

The below graphical representations depict the results:



Figure 4: Gender Wise sum of scores in pre-and post-tests

The results indicate an interesting finding. The pre- test scores for both males (2221) and female (2205) highlight that the male students fared better than the females in the pre-tests. However, the post-test sum

of scores indicate that the females fared better in the post-tests. The female score was (3284) which was higher against the male score (3211). It is interesting to note that the female gender showed better overall improvement in the study.

- 3) **Average Improvement Percentage:** The researcher also measured the average improvement percentage for male and female students along with an overall improvement percentage. This was done to assess improvement in training scores with reference to gender of students.

Table 5: Average improvement percentage

Gender	Average of Improvement%
Female	50%
Male	46%
Grand Total	48%

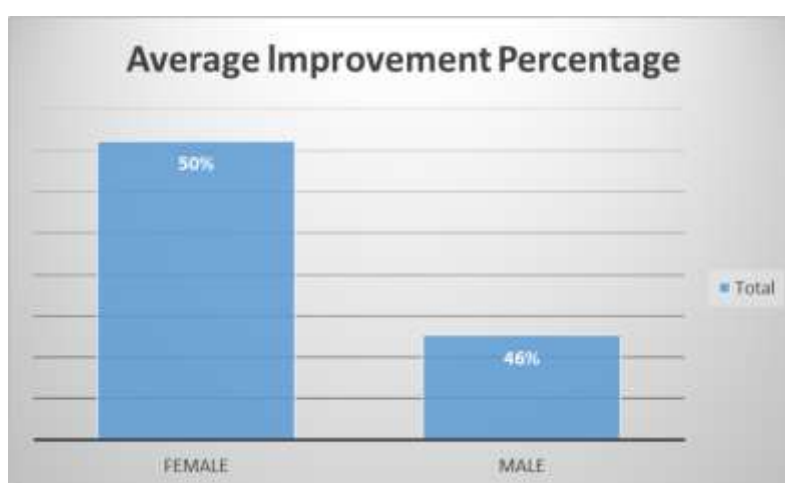


Figure 5: Graphical representation of Average Improvement Percentage

The findings clearly indicate that the female students showed an improvement of 50% in the post-test as compared to the male students who had improved on their inter cultural communication understanding by 46%. So, the female students improved more and we may infer that female as a gender probably is more sensitive towards communicating across culture. The overall improvement percentage achieved by the training intervention was 48% which is a significance difference.

A p value score for the two group scores was also calculated using MS. Excel which was 1.23387E-56 (less than .05) and represented marked difference between and pre-and posttest scores and was hence the results showed significant difference. The analysis scores therefore support the researcher's hypothesis.

VI DISCUSSION

The pilot test done on the students signifies marked improvement (48%) in their understanding of inter cultural communication with reference to Japanese business manners. The students underwent all activities and enthusiastically took part in them. There was a marked improvement in their post-test scores and they had clarity on the below parameters:

Cultural context sensitivity: There was higher developed knowledge on the different context culture and students were able to identify different cultures on the basis of them representing high or low context culture. They also gained deep understanding on the key attributes of both HC and LC groups and that helped them immensely in understanding personalities from the other world.

Components of culture: The students also picked up on the nuances around culture and realized how an individual's attitude and beliefs are impacted by their cultural upbringing. They understood how important it was to evaluate one's own strong opinions about the other world which may be an assumption and has led to stereotyping cultures. This was an important learning for these students.

Japanese business manner: The students used the activities and videos to understand Japanese business manners. They also enacted their information and key learnings gained during Role play activity which was a part of the intervention program. They understood important business manners viz. exchanging business cards, handling business introductions, conduct in Japanese business meetings, Common phrases of importance used to build rapport with the Japanese customer and non-verbal gestures of Japanese.

VII RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above findings, it is evident that appropriate training on inculcating and improving inter cultural competence is critical for professional students for sustaining employment. The ability to communicate across cultures is emerging as a fifth communication skill in the millennial generation as discussed in the literature review. The researcher has tested the impact of training intervention and has measured improvement in the students. This paper is an attempt to strongly recommend specific training on the same by introducing relevant activities (as discussed and proposed by the researcher) to be made a part of the professional courses in communication. This training is proposed for the pre-final and final year students who are getting prepared for their employment. This will be a good strategy and will support in the employability skills of professional students as they start their employment in the globally diverse world. The key to survive a good communication with all stakeholders in business is to be equipped with relevant skills and inter cultural competence is one of the primary skills in the present day and age.

VIII LIMITATIONS

The researcher has used training intervention related to Japanese business manners for the pilot study. There may be difference in impact and results for training on other cultures viz. American or Russian etc. This can be an area for further studies for other research scholars and may further add up to this pool of research around inter cultural communication.

IX CONCLUSION

As the business world undergoes a transformation and accommodates to global fitment-it is urgent and important for training the emerging workforce on the key skill required to sustain and flourish in jobs. Inter cultural cooperation and communication stands out as one of the most important skill set to achieve and get trained upon. As it is said- "If you communicate- you can get by, but if you communicate skillfully; you can create miracles"!!!

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