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"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

The Perception of International Business Management Students towards Intercultural Communication Apprehension

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Abstract

Intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) can affect the ability to contact people from different backgrounds and to do international business. The main purpose of this study was to understand the perception of international business management (IBM) students towards ICA. Mixed methods were used to conduct this study. A quantitative approach was used to collect data regarding the perception of IBM students towards ICA. A qualitative approach was used to gather information on intercultural communication. Pre-test and post-test surveys were used to gather the data and check if the students' knowledge changed after receiving the training. The results presented that the classroom-integrated sessions regarding intercultural communication had helped the IBM students to have a lower level of hesitation and anxiety when communicating with people from different cultures or backgrounds. The results in the open-ended question section also indicated that the participants had gained more understanding in intercultural communication and expanded their perspective in intercultural communication.

Keywords: *INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION*

Introduction

For an organization to be successful in the global market, there are various factors that the organization needs to take into account. One of the main important factors is intercultural communication. This factor is not only essential for the organization to be successful in doing business, but also to be able to manage its employees from different backgrounds. On the other hand, one of the obstacles that interrupt the ability to communicate with people from a different culture is ICA. ICA can cause anxiety of a person when dealing with others and also affect a person's capability in doing international business. Many organizations are aware of this matter and attempt to recruit employees who have intercultural communication knowledge. As international business management



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students, the students are not only studying various courses regarding international business but also courses concerning cultures. By being aware of different cultures and ICA, the students would be able to work in different types of business in different countries. Furthermore, the knowledge of intercultural communication can be an advantage of the international business students when working in global organizations.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to understand the perception of international business management students towards ICA. By understanding the ICA of these group of the students, NUIC can arrange a proper curriculum, training, or teaching methods for the students. Moreover, international business students would be aware of the importance of intercultural communication and able to eliminate the anxiety that might happen when dealing with people from different cultures.

Research Objectives

1. To understand the perception of international business management students towards intercultural communication apprehension.
2. To recognize the concept of intercultural communication in international business management students' perspective.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of international business management students towards intercultural communication apprehension?
2. What is intercultural communication in international business management students' perspective?

Scope of Research

1. This study conducted at Naresuan University International College (NUIC), Thailand. The college is a faculty of Naresuan University.
2. The sample size of this study would be all the second year students who had not registered to the introduction to intercultural communication course from the previous semesters. The numbers of the 2nd students were approximately 35 students.
3. Pre-test and post-test surveys were used as instruments to collect the data. The questions in the pre-test and post-test surveys were the same, for the researcher to check if the students' knowledge changed after finishing the sessions (approximately ten weeks).



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Literature Review

Intercultural Communication: Intercultural communication refers to the sending and receiving messages across languages and cultures (Arent, 2009). This concept can also refer to the communication between people from different subcultures even they might be in the same country. Currently, a person has many chances to contact with people from other cultures in the workplace and his/her daily life. Hybles (2008) stated that by understanding intercultural communication, people could understand their own identity; solve misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mistrust; enhance and enrich the quality of civilization; and become effective citizens of national communities.

Intercultural Communication and Global Business: Intercultural communication is one of the broad topics in international business management. With the globalization of business, there has been increasing attention to intercultural communication (Dzenowagis, 2008). According to Washington, Okoro, and Thomas (2012), intercultural communication in global business can be referred as an understanding of cultural difference. Intercultural communication competence can assist businesses to close the communication gap between countries involved in international trade negotiations. Intercultural communication can also allow multinational and multicultural managers to be able to manage cultural differences more effectively.

Intercultural Communication Apprehension (ICA): According to Neuliep (2018), ICA can be referred as “the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with persons from a different culture” (p. 25). Intercultural communication anxiety can also be defined as fear and anxiety of a person when communicating with others from different cultures (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). Once a person has anxiety when dealing with other people from different backgrounds, it can block the ability to communicate and affect his/her business. ICA is one of the main barriers in communication with people from different cultures. Chen (2010) stated that respect for cultural differences and intercultural enjoyment could predict the lack of ICA. According to Fall, Kelly, MacDonald, Primm, and Holmes (2013), if ICA level is decreased, then a person’s willingness to communicate with a person from another culture can be increased. Furthermore, an organization with the awareness of ICA would be able to improve its employee in order to be successful in the global market.

Theoretical Lens

Constructivist theory: The theory was developed by Jerome Seymour Bruner (Bruner, 1960). The constructivist theoretical framework is based on the theme that learners construct new ideas or concepts based on existing knowledge (Overbaugh, 2004). Bruner



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emphasized that learning is an active process in which students construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. The learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure (connecting thoughts and organizing information) to do so (Clabaugh, 2010).

KWL model: This model is used as the model for this study. Donna Ogle created the model in 1986. This model is a teaching model designed to help students learn from nonfiction text in any content area. The model strategy consists of a multi-step procedure such as brainstorming and categorizing, purpose-setting through questioning and examining answers to those questions. KWL stands for “what I Know, what I want to Learn, and what I Learned” (Gipe, n.d.). From its foundation, the KWL strategy works as an instructional reading strategy. The KWL model is used in this study to train the participants.

Research Methodology

Mixed methods were used to conduct this study. A quantitative approach was used to gather data regarding the perception of international business management students towards ICA via a survey tool. On the other hand, a qualitative method was used to collect data regarding intercultural communication through an open-ended question.

Data Collection Method: Pre-test and post-test surveys were used as instruments to collect the data for this study. The questions in the pre-test and post-test surveys were the same, for the researcher to check if the students’ knowledge changed after finishing the sessions (approximately ten weeks).

Sample Size: The sample size of this study would be all the second year students who had not registered for the course from the previous semesters. The numbers of the 2nd students were approximately 35 students. Their participation would be voluntary.

Research tool: Questionnaire survey was the research tool for this study. The questions on the surveys were broken into three sections: the first section was demographics of the students, the second section was questions related to intercultural communication apprehension, and the last section was an open-ended question related to intercultural communication. The questions related intercultural communication apprehension were questions from the personal report of intercultural communication apprehension by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997).

Data Analysis: To analyze quantitative data, the paired t-test would be an appropriate analysis for the study. Since the study would use a pre and post-test survey. To analyze qualitative data, open coding would be used to clarify the results of the study.



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Findings/Results

There were 32 participants in this study. These participants were IBM students who studied at NUIC. The first section of the results presented personal information of the participants. The participants' ages were varied from 18 to 21 years old. The highest number of the participants were the 19 years old participants (63 percentage). There was 56 percent of female participants and 44 percent of male participants. There was 28 percent of the total respondents who never had experience of being abroad. However, most of the participants (72 percent) had experience of being abroad. Only 3 percent of the participants never communicated with someone from different nation or background. On the other hand, the highest percentage of the answers were participants who had indirect experience of communicating with someone from different nation or background (47 percent).

The second section presented the results of Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA). To discover whether the perception of international business management students towards ICA changed after finishing the class-integration sessions, pre-test and post-test scores were used to compare. The results presented that before receiving the training, 25 percent of the participant had low level of ICA, 69 percent of the participants had moderate level of ICA, and 6 percent of the participants had high level of ICA. Meanwhile, after receiving the training, the results showed that 31 percent of the participants had low level of ICA, 69 percent of the participants had moderate level of ICA, and none of the participants had high level of ICA.

The results of an open-ended question regarding the participants' perspectives on intercultural communication were also analyzed. The question was "In your opinion, what is intercultural communication?" The pre-test results showed only a few definitions of intercultural communication from the participants. Most of the answers explained that intercultural communication was the communication or interaction with people from different cultures. Some answers showed that intercultural communication was to learn to communicate with people from different backgrounds and cultures. Only a small number of answers indicated that intercultural communication referred to exchange knowledge and cultures. A few of the participants did not give the answers to this question.

The post-test results of the open-ended question showed that intercultural communication could be referred to as the understanding of different cultures, religions and backgrounds, and understand nonverbal and verbal communication. Other answers indicated that intercultural communication was the study that can help people to avoid misunderstanding and conflict when communicating with people from different backgrounds. A few answers also stated that intercultural communication was communication by talking or using social media, and other types of media. The results in the



open-ended question section comparing between pre-test and post-test showed that the participants had gained more understanding related to intercultural communication. Moreover, the answers also revealed that the participants had expanded their perspective regarding intercultural communication.

Table 1

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
Mean	38.0625	35.25
Variance	91.54435484	69.48387097
Observations	32	32
Pearson Correlation	-0.07907283	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	31	
t Stat	1.207372333	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.118210258	
t Critical one-tail	1.695518783	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.236420516	
t Critical two-tail	2.039513446	

Table 1 shows the results of paired t-test between pre-test and post-test scores of the participants. The results show that the total mean of pre-test scores was 38.0625. Meanwhile, the total mean of post-test scores was 35.25. These results indicate that the participants tend to have lower intercultural communication apprehension level. This result can also be translated that the participants had lower level of anxiety when communicated with people from different cultures and background after they received the training.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Regarding the results of this study, it can be concluded that, after the participants received the class-integration training regarding intercultural communication, the participants had a lower level of intercultural communication apprehension. It can also indicate that the class-integration sessions have helped the participants to improve their hesitation or anxiety when communicating with people from different backgrounds and cultures. Moreover, the open-ended question also helped to indicate that the perceptives of the participants changed after they received the training. The results also showed that the participants had a more in-depth perspective and be able to clarify more meaning and understanding regarding



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intercultural communication. The research questions of this study can also be answered as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the perception of international business management students towards intercultural communication apprehension? The results presented that before receiving the training, 25 percent of the participant had low level of ICA, 69 percent of the participants had moderate level of ICA, and 6 percent of the participants had high level of ICA. The pre-test results indicated that some of the participants had high level of anxiety and hesitation when communicating with people from other cultures or backgrounds. After completing the class-integration sessions, the results showed that 31 percent of the participants had low level of ICA, 69 percent of the participants had moderate level of ICA, and none of the participants had high level of ICA. The results of the post-test also showed that the participants had more percentage on the low ICA level and none of the participants had high ICA level. The post-test results indicated that after receiving the training, none of the participants had a high level of anxiety and hesitation when communicating with people from other cultures or backgrounds. This can also be interpreted that the class-integration method has improved the perception of international business management students towards intercultural communication apprehension.

Research Question 2: What is intercultural communication in international business management students' perspective? Before receiving the class-integration training, the perceptive of the IBM students regarding intercultural communication was to communicate or interact with people from different cultures, to learn to communicate with people from different backgrounds and cultures or to exchange knowledge and cultures. Some of the participants did not give the answers in this part. After receiving the training, the perceptive of the participants regarding intercultural communication showed that intercultural communication was to communicate and interact with people from different cultures. Some answers specified that intercultural communication could be referred to as the understanding of different cultures, religions, and backgrounds, and the understanding of nonverbal and verbal communication. The participants also indicated that intercultural communication was the study that can help people to avoid misunderstanding and conflict when communicating with people from different backgrounds. Additionally, a few answers also showed that intercultural communication was the communication over talking or using social media, and other types of media. The results of the answers from pre-test and post-test in this section also indicated that the students had improved their perspective regarding intercultural communication.



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Recommendation for Research

First, this study only focused on IBM students who studied at NUIC, further research should focus on different types of participants to receive different perception regarding intercultural cultural communication. Second, since most of IBM students had experience dealing with lecturers or students from different countries, the further research might concentrate on people who never have any experiences contacting people from different countries or backgrounds to receive broader perception. Third, further research might focus on other aspects of intercultural communication other than intercultural communication apprehension to gain a broader perspective on intercultural communication in the global market. Fourth, this study was a mixed method, further research might focus on an in-depth perception of the participants by using the unstructured interview. The unstructured interview would allow the participants to give more in-depth information regarding their opinions or ideas.

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