

Influence of Covid 19 pandemic on intercultural communication and dialogue

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Abstract. Researchers researching the theme of intercultural communication and dialogue must re-examine a lot of objectives for the re-enlightenment of intercultural relations due to the impact of Covid 19 pandemic, which has distressed human interaction and social cultural contexts. This research focuses on the concept of intercultural communication and dialogue and its connectivity to humans internationally. This Paper reveals the complication of physical contact, impact of the pandemic, human suffering, hybrid education, social disruption, and social inequality. This Paper also brings SWOT analysis which unfolds weaknesses and threats to work on, with the help of strengths and opportunities. This paper also addresses the impact of intercultural communication and dialogues in the area of values, beliefs, conflict, stereotypes, languages, verbal and non-verbal communication, spoken and written language, relationships and interactions between people and society. This paper also highlights the influence of digitalization on society globally during the Covid-19 pandemic. All areas are specifically addressed to overcome all challenges mentioned in this paper for understanding the dimensions of cross-cultural cooperation and communication.

1 Introduction

We live in a globalized world, where the concept of intercultural communication plays an important role. We travel abroad, interacting with different groups of people having different cultures, mentalities, ways of sharing information face to face, which is now part of our life. It is always interesting and exciting to know about other cultures, traditions, ways of communication and behaviour. Sometimes people learn foreign languages, but that is not enough for them to understand the culture.

Intercultural communication is a combination of three words, where "inter" means between and "cultural" comes from culture and lastly communication, which is a process of exchanging information verbally or sometimes non-verbally. So, intercultural communication implies the interaction of people having two different cultural backgrounds and the main aim is to convey information and understand each other verbally or non-verbally [1].

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There are two different types of intercultural communication: Verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Both transmissions are essential and have a valuable place in intercultural communication skills. Verbal communication is made up of words using spoken and written language patterns to convey thoughts to listeners. For example, stress on particular phrases, tone as amplification of voice, etc. Whereas, non-verbal communication is used to express our feelings by gestures, facial expressions, body language, sometimes eye contact or handshake, etc. According to researchers, 65% of communication takes place through non-verbal, by using gestures, eye contact, body language or clothing and the remaining 35% is transmitted through the use of languages, spoken or written [2].

In this globalized world, many companies worldwide, but at the same time, they face many cross-cultural issues [20]. For example, Coca-Cola once tried to name its brand in a similar phonetic in China "KeKou-KeLa", which literally meant "female horse stuffed with wax", which could have spoilt the image of the company. Japan is one of the best examples of verbal communication, which is sometimes unintelligible. When a Japanese says "yes" it doesn't always mean that he or she understands you. If the Japanese don't understand or do not agree with the interlocutor, he or she will always say "yes" so as to not sound rude and tries to express his etiquette and politeness [3].

Let us take an example of non-verbal communication. In India as we all know, Indians eat their food by hand, which is unacceptable and considered ill-mannered in many other countries and cultures. Also, when people in South India shake their head right to left, it means consent but in other cultures, its vice-versa non-consent. It is popular around the world that Russians don't smile, but when a Russian smiles, it means that the interlocutor is valued. but when a foreigner smiles at a Russian, it will seem stupid to the Russian. In some western countries, this is a regular practice, for example, the USA, the UK etc [4].

2 Materials and methods

The research is conducted by analyzing different sources and reports published by national and international organizations as well as journals. The research also includes the analysis of works of several authors, bringing you specific vocabularies to get over the theme of intercultural communication and dialogue.

3 Theoretical framework

The entire human race is interdependent and correlated with each other, but because of the COVID 19 pandemic, there is now a raise in discrimination, inequality, and vulnerability. It is the time when society needs to be more cooperative and solidarity than ever before. People have stalled travel, countries have closed their borders and the rise of xenophobia is also seen among the society. Communication gap within the society has led to business failures, political disagreements, radical and ethical issues which causes marginalization [17].

4 Outline of Covid 19 pandemic

Covid 19 pandemic has touched almost every international border, which has distressed national and global economy, human suffering, inequality, social disruption, and intercultural communication. This Pandemic has split the connection between people and the society. The Pandemic was announced in December 2019 by China to the world [5]. The entire world did not foresee the upcoming consequences on its nations and society.

One after the another, almost every country started closing their borders, imposing severe lockdown, and putting people into isolation, which made everyone stop interacting with each other and weaken psychologically. Doctors and scientists were unable to find a specific treatment. People were recommended to stay home, maintain social distance, and to avoid travel. This might turn into a threat to an increase in social inequality, positive interaction, diversity and restrictions of human rights and fundamental freedom [6]. The international scholars of intercultural communication are disquieted by the increase in racism, prejudice, stereotypes as well as discriminatory practices [19]. Due to collective cooperation between doctors, scientists and pharmaceutical companies, we have multiple vaccines around the world to fight against this harsh pandemic.

5 Personal contact in Covid 19 pandemic

Physical contact is very important because it's a kind of mechanism which sets up relationship between people, helps build strong friendship and connections with deep trust. In normal conditions, we maintain physical contact with people by hugging, kissing, shaking hands, high-five but the pandemic has changed everything. Now people are afraid of having physical contact with others. According to ~~the~~ researcher and a Senior Reporter of The Sydney Morning Herald, "Andrew Taylor", One third of people felt comfortable kissing their closest - down from 63 percent pre Covid and more than tripled to 15 percent people preferring no physical contact at workplace. Approximately, 88 percent of people who wanted to shake hands with their colleagues, friends or strangers before the pandemic fell to just 30 percent, and 58.5 percent preferring an elbow greeting [9].

On the other hand, world leaders prefer using Indian gestures of greeting Namaste, which is widely accepted by the US president Donald Trump, the French President Emmanuel Macron, British Royalty Prince Charles and many others. After the bilateral talk between the US president Donald Trump and the Ireland Prime Minister Leo Varadkar in the Oval office at the White House, The US president said, they didn't shake hands and used the Indian way of greeting gesture Namaste and that it was easy. [10]. Shaking hands while wearing gloves isn't considered professional but Covid 19 has changed everything, but now no one wants to shake hands with gloves. Remember the time when people sneezed and we used to say "God bless you", but now people look at them with horrible eyes and try to maintain distance from them. People are more concerned about their health [8].

6 Impact of Covid 19 on Intercultural dialogue and community relations

Intercultural dialogue is considered as a deliberative tool for amplifying sustainable development and peace in the society. Intercultural dialogue is a part of communication between different cultural groups, holding different conflicts, points of view and beliefs to acknowledge those differences [18]. It builds intercultural connections between groups of people having communication differences in religion, nationality, socio-economic lines, ethnicity, and race [11]. Dialogues can have verbal or non-verbal interpretation, but the most important behavior is to carry quality of communication between entrant and interlocutor, to enhance their willingness and point of view. The key objective of intercultural dialogue is to not have conflict or agreement but understanding [12].

No one expected to face vulnerability, inequality or discrimination in the society caused by Covid 19 pandemic which must soon be undertaken by the state and civil society

activists to act. There are four main issues which have strong impact on the society which are illustrated below:

1. The amplification of social inequalities and vulnerabilities

According to Human Rights Watch, the highly impacted areas are: lack of social protection, having low income to cope and adopt opportunities provided by the state, limited access to such services which are given on behalf of race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity etc., and limited access to technologies. People are tired of living in the society where health systems are on the verge of breakdown. Covid 19 has marginalized and excluded society access to basic services which created high psychological and mental disorders among people [13].

2. Rise of xenophobia and ethno-cultural racism

The purpose of Intercultural dialogues is to eliminate ethno-cultural racism, discrimination or social economic differences and it must pronounce respect, empathy and understanding in the society. Things have changed now, due to Covid 19 pandemic. There has been a sharp increment in attacks against Asians, people of Asian descent, tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scaremongering in the society around the world. Somewhere down the line, government leaders and senior officials are responsible for directly or indirectly enhancing the hate against Asians by calling Chinese virus or Wuhan Virus, which outcomes the uncontrollable racism, crimes, and xenophobia in the society. As a result of it, Asians were even punched on their faces and were asked to Go back to China and even abused [14]. To solve these issues, WHO announced to label SARS-CoV-2 which causes Covid 19 virus, using Greek letters [15].

3. Rise in gender-based violence

Gender based violence has already had its place in society but due to the pandemic, millions of people were forced to sit in lockdown and isolation, which skyrocketed gender inequalities and vulnerabilities around the world [13]. Women and girls faced domestic violence, sexual harassment, child abuse and intimate partner violence which became a serious issue in our society. Thousands of people filed for divorce after releasing lockdown around the world. People became more aggressive and intolerant [16].

4. Rising discrimination against non-citizens

Pandemic has touched and impacted almost everything, even modern lifestyle and citizens nationally and internationally, particularly refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers, international students, which led to the rise of discrimination, intolerance, inequality and racism. They were blamed for spreading viruses and viewed suspiciously for spreading harmful diseases. Refugees and Asylum seekers who were detained in refugee camps are a threat to their vulnerable lives. People refuse to interact with foreigners, especially international students. International students have faced hardship accessing healthcare, housing and had been forced to return to their home. many others Could not cross the border due to travel restrictions and had to purchase very expensive air tickets [13].

7 Use of digital technology in intercultural communication and dialogue during Covid 19 pandemic

The disastrous consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic are, breaking the bridge between people and society as well as mental stress and depression due to lack of interaction. People have to maintain social distance, stay quarantined and avoiding physical contact, which has created a gap in society. Students went from offline to online and workers were asked to work from home which also created strain in personal and professional life. Apart from this, digital technologies have helped society come together and have created new

opportunities for older and younger generations. Developers have developed and innovated online platforms which have brought the world from a severe global crisis [27].

People could not meet and hug each other but they could at least see and talk to each other via social media. Several platforms were created to study and work online which of course can't replace offline platforms but at least, help us to cope with the situation. As we know, the older generation and the generation X are not very keen to learn new technologies, but most of them have stepped forward learning them which is a bright step toward the future. Students worldwide went for distance learning via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or different mobile apps while monitoring the effectiveness and efficiency of courses, teachers, and students, which was earlier not quite popular [27]. Hybrid diplomacy reaches its new height, politicians and world leaders have also joined digital stages and made it popular among society. Even though state exams, conferences, business meetings, birthday celebrations, concerts, protests, movie premieres and ceremonies also took place online, which set the new benchmark for humanity. Beside all these developments and innovations there are several third-grade countries, who could not upgrade themselves and reach new heights due to lack of accessibility and knowledge of internet. It an era of digital evolution which would connect the entire world closely in more decent way, which proves that we are on the right path.

8 Covid 19 impact on intercultural education and training

Pandemic has taught us a lot about our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats where we need to work on, so that we can create a healthy society with an open mentality.

Table 1. SWOT analysis for understanding the impact of Covid 19 (Compiled by author).

Strengths	Weakness
1. Globalization. 2. Internet, fast connectivity between nations 3. Collaboration between different countries, organizations, unions, and communities. 4. International organizations which help to deal with international and national issues for example, UN, WHO, UNESCO etc. 5. International languages like English and the multilingual world which give us better understanding. 6. Digitalization	1. Intolerance. 2. Lack of knowledge and transparency about the root of issues and solutions. 3. Interconnectedness and interdependence of the global community creates imbalance during crises or pandemics. 4. Lack of solidarity 5. Marginalisation 6. Lack of accessibility and knowledge of Internet
Opportunities	Threats
1. Promotion of cross-cultural and inter group solidarity. 2. Develop intercultural training or programs. 3. Online teaching and self-learning portal or apps. 4. Hybrid blends of cultural learning and information sharing. 5. Developing multiculturalism. 6. Transparency and easy access to information	1. Discrimination among minorities, different race, culture, gender and so on. 2. Racism. 3. Social inequalities and vulnerabilities. 4. Crime against different nationalities. 5. Gender-based violence 6. Cybersecurity, privacy, misinformation, and terrorism.

SWOT analysis shows us the points which we need to work on. The Time has come for our governments to unite and become more secular and reform their nations to deal with weaknesses such as intolerance, lack of transparency, lack of solidarity, etc. We do have global support to cope with these weaknesses by using the platform of globalization and international organizations like UN, UNESCO etc. Certainly, it generates several opportunities like promoting cross cultural solidarity, online teaching development, stability among nations etc. [21]. But if we can't get by them, then we will face threats like rise in discrimination, racism, gender-based violence etc., which we do not need for shaping a better planet.

9 Results and discussion

How to improve intercultural communication and dialogue during or after Covid 19 pandemic.

If somebody wants to interact with a foreigner or any other person having a different cultural background, they have to follow the following aspects to have productive conversations:

1. extravert: a person should be an extravert in order to be gratified with the outer world. An extravert person is enthusiastic, talkative, which helps him to accept another culture and make his companion comfortable. At the same time, you have to be open-minded and tolerant.

2. avoid using a slang and local language: sometimes your companion cannot understand your intention of using slang and local language, so it's best to avoid it.

3. Avoid non-verbal communication: nonverbal communication most probably the main reason for misunderstanding. Sometimes your gestures, facial expressions, or eye contact will give a wrong impression to your companion. For example, looking into the eyes of a teacher convey your concentration in class, but in India, students are prohibited to do that because it will count as disrespect towards the teacher.

4. respect people coming from different castes and cultures: We always need to respect all religions, castes, cultures to get a common language, because this topic is sensitive. It also gives you space and makes your conversation much more comfortable, especially in business environment [25].

5. The Pandemic teaches us the main lessons that we need a deeper engagement and collaboration among different communities, cultures, and sectors to shape sustainable cross-cultural society to deal with challenges like global conflict, social-cultural degradation etc. [22].

6. Building solidarity is also our main priority which would help us to face global challenges and social inequalities.

7. The duty of leaders is to educate society not to go with racism against particular communities. As we have seen a spike in racism against Asians and ethnicity having the covid mutation.

8. In this multilingual world, it's our responsibility not to create discrimination and to respect each other.

10 Conclusion

Intercultural communication has a diverse form of communication. depending upon ethnic groups, caste, culture, race or religion. Due to globalization, we have to face this complex system of communication to maintain the balance between different groups of people. Knowledge of intercultural communication will make our interaction less challenging and

more productive if we are a good Observer. Sometimes it isn't easy to decode the message of our interlocutor, in that case, either ignore in a good manner as the Japanese do, or clarify the point. There are several other ways to learn intercultural communication skills, but this paper will give you a general understanding of carrying conversations with a person following another culture or ritual. The grip on it can be beneficial for students studying abroad or interacting with foreigners, businessmen who run their businesses overseas or tourists who love visiting other countries [23].

Our planet is the only habitable planet in our solar system. It has a diverse state of living, having different cultures, religions, races, nations, mentality and languages. It forms intercultural communication and dialogue as we are linked with globalization. Governments have to form special public education programmes and policies against hate crimes to get rid of discrimination and support communities who are victims of it. They have to take initiative to fight against crime like xenophobia through social media platforms which are widely used by the young generation and educate them to become more tolerant and secular [24, 26]. There should be some provision regarding migrant workers, minorities, international students, refugees and asylum seekers to generate employment and training to sustain themselves during a difficult time like a pandemic. It would create a long term sustainable and equitable social and economic development. Governments have to introduce compulsory intercultural communication and dialogue programs in schools and universities, and additionally at workplaces to establish a cross-cultural society and intercultural atmosphere in their countries, which will help to create a well moulded, secular and tolerant society. Digitalization has significantly upgraded the level of intercultural communication and dialogue through the transition from online learning to e-commerce to hybrid diplomacy. Organizations worldwide are shifting online which create easy access and transparency. It also reflects on the living standard of the society which raises the position of a country internationally.

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