

## **Multiculturalism and Communication in the HE Classroom Context: A Namibian Case Study**

PETRINA PATRICIA WITBEEN & HAILELEUL ZELEKE WOLDEMARIAM  
Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia

### **Abstract**

This study was conducted at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) to investigate the challenges of intercultural communication between lecturers and first year students in the Faculty of Human Sciences, Windhoek, Namibia. The study followed a mixed methods research design. A total of 40 respondents formed the study inclusive of lecturers, local and foreign students following a simple random sampling method. The researchers selected 40 respondents who could speak different languages and belong to diverse cultures. Out of the 40 respondents, 10 lecturers who dealt with first year students were selected to be part of the study. A total of 11 foreign respondents were included in the study and the other 19 were local Namibian students. Cultural and linguistic diversities were the main selection criteria. Primary data was collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. It was found out that the main barriers to intercultural communication amongst students and lecturers were the use of English as a medium of communication, anxiety and fear, generalizations including prejudice, poor listening skills (noise: distractions such as cell phone use and unclear messages), physical separation – the space between lecturers and students during classes, lack of knowledge of others' cultural background, ignorance, and lack of knowledge of others linguistic background. Therefore, it was recommended that English with intercultural communication content should be offered to all first-year students in the Faculty regardless of the programme. On the other hand, since NUST offers language classes for foreigners and beginners, students who struggle with English as a medium of instruction and communication are advised to enrol for extra language classes to help them to effectively communicate with lecturers and fellow classmates. It was further recommended that to enhance the competence of students and teachers in intercultural communication and interlanguage pragmatics, lecturers and students should expand the existing knowledge to enable them embrace cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, intercultural communication, culture, cultural identity theory, multiculturalism, communication barriers and interlanguage pragmatics.

### **1.1. Background of the study**

Rapid development of international trade, improved communication, and transportation technologies as well as globalisation tendencies, have greatly increased the capacity for multicultural interactions among people from all over the world (Wang & Lê, 2006). On a regular basis, people from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds interact at different levels. Communication in everyday life has become essential and it is hard to imagine how a society would be able to function without modern communication systems. In general terms, we basically communicate to share information, give instructions and exchange information. Communication is used to transfer knowledge; hence, it is critical for lecturers and students to understand each

other in a multicultural and multilingual higher education context. According to Steinberg as cited in Ntuli (2012), communication does not occur in a void; people always communicate within a situation or setting.

NUST has its roots in the establishment of the Academy for Tertiary Education Act No. 13 of 1980. Five years later, another Act, No. 9 of 1985, was promulgated and, by it, the Academy, consisting of a university component (the present University of Namibia), a Technikon, and a College for Out of School Training, were established. Shortly after Namibia's independence in 1990, it was resolved that the three components be collapsed into two independent higher education institutions, namely, a university and a polytechnic. Two years later, with the establishment of the Polytechnic of Namibia by Act No. 33 of 1994, the Technikon of Namibia and the College for Out of School Training (COST) merged to become the Polytechnic of Namibia. Subsequently, the Namibia University of Science and Technology, formally known as the Polytechnic of Namibia, was promulgated by the Act, (Act 7 of 2015) and became operational on 16 November 2015 ([www.nust.na](http://www.nust.na)). In 2017, the university employed 772 academics of which 105 were from the Faculty of Human Sciences and 550 were administrative staff. The Faculty of Human Sciences had a total of 1,532 students in 2017 of which 660 were in the first year (NUST, Institutional Planning, 2017).

The purpose of this research was to investigate the intercultural communication between lecturers and first year students at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST): Faculty of Human Sciences, main campus, Windhoek. The research examined how cultural background influences communication, especially the learning and teaching process and how cultural differences affect the way lecturers and students communicate and receive messages. When people from different cultures communicate, misunderstandings are bound to occur. Therefore, this study was necessitated by the fact that, if lecturers and students were to coexist in a culturally diverse learning environment, it is essential to promote cultural awareness and sensitivity which will enable them to interact culturally and communicate effectively, thus avoiding inevitable misunderstandings and academic failures.

## 1.2. Statement of the problem

The complexity of academic communication is far greater than generally believed, especially in intercultural interactions. According to Elze and Podlesny (2014), different cultures gather and interpret information differently. This is mainly because people use their own cultural values, beliefs and norms to guide themselves when interacting with people from other cultures. Seeing that NUST encompasses a culturally diverse academic community; miscommunication can easily arise, especially during intercultural interactions. Miscommunication in the academic environment can lead to inaccurate information flow which causes inaccuracies and delays in information and knowledge exchange. It is therefore important to eliminate these risks which can influence communication and knowledge exchange in the Faculty of Human Sciences. Additionally, the problem that needs to be addressed should include communication barriers that are experienced when people from different cultures converse. Communication barriers are inevitable, especially when people from different cultures communicate. This is because people come from different cultural backgrounds and this can cause communication breakdown which influences perceptions and ultimately affects the way they communicate. It is therefore important to avoid/minimise communication breakdown in order to ensure an enabling learning environment. It is crucial to find solutions to these problems in order to minimise intercultural misunderstandings/ miscommunication and improve the communication between lecturers and students in the Faculty of Human Sciences.

The research focused on three key areas, namely, how cultural differences influence communication especially in the learning and teaching process; what com-

munication barriers were experienced in a multilingual/multicultural academic context, and finally, how understanding the culture of foreign and local students can minimise misunderstandings. There was a very strong need to study the interactions between lecturers and first year students at NUST because no similar studies have been done previously.

### 1.3. Research questions

Situated in a multilingual and multicultural higher education context, this research generally aimed at investigating the intercultural communication between lecturers and first year students in the Faculty of Human Sciences and guided by the following research questions:

1. How does cultural difference influence the teaching and learning process in an HE context?
2. What communication barriers are experienced when lecturers and students interact ?
3. How can understanding the culture of foreign and local students minimize misunderstandings in an HE context?

## 2.0. Literature review

### 2.1. *Multicultural communication*

Melinte (2012) states that people use their own cultural rules and values to guide their words and their deeds, even thoughts, and that they also use them as standards to judge the words and deeds of others. This is mainly because national culture is so deeply imprinted in the heart of people of a specific nation. From the time they are born, people are subject to the influence of national culture. People adopt their own culture as the centre of their lives; they believe that only what people enact around them is correct. According to Gerber and William as cited in Wang & Lê (2006, p.1) “cultural differences are indeed significant, especially in areas of dialogue and public participation.” Ting-Toomey (1996) argues that when individuals are socialised, they learn various patterns of interaction that are based on the norms, rules, and values of their culture. These patterns of interaction form the basis for individuals' communication styles. These styles that individuals use to communicate vary across cultures and within cultures. All the above-mentioned assertions are supported by Devito as cited in Wang & Gu, (2005), who maintains that nonverbal messages and their meaning, such as the appropriate use of time and space, touch, eye contact, eye avoidance, facial expressions, body language, body distance, paralanguage, and silence, amongst others, all contribute to successful communication. Culture plays a large role in moulding all of our nonverbal behaviours, which comprise an important part of the communication process (Matsumoto & Takeuchi, 1998.)

Ting-Toomey (1996) cited these variations in communication styles as explained in Hall's (1976) differentiation between low and high-context communication. Low-context communication involves the use of explicit and direct messages in which meanings are contained mainly in the transmitted messages. High-context communication, in contrast, involves the use of implicit and indirect messages in which meanings are embedded in the person or in the sociocultural context. Hall argues that people in a culture use both low- and high-context communication, but one tends to be predominant. However, low-context communication is used predominantly in individualistic cultures, whereas high context communication is used predominantly in collectivistic cultures. Individualism involves a focus on the self as a unique entity, and collectivism involves a focus on the self-embedded in group memberships. The culture in which individuals are raised influences the way individuals are socialised in terms of individ-

ualistic and collectivistic tendencies. Cultural individualism-collectivism has a direct effect on communication because it affects the norms and rules that guide behaviour in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The individualistic or collectivistic tendencies that individuals learn when being socialised into their cultures in turn also influence individual-level factors such as the way individuals conceive themselves and the values individuals hold. Therefore, both low context and high context of styles of communication have a direct effect on communication behaviour and an indirect effect on communication behaviour that is mediated through individual-level factors such as self-construal and values. Individualistic and collective cultures influence the major cultural values which individuals learn and the ways that members of cultures acquire perceptions of themselves. Communication style has a direct influence on behaviour (e.g., through norms/rules used to guide behaviour), but it also influences behaviour indirectly through the values and self-construal that individual members learn when being socialised into a culture. Individualistic cultures emphasize the goals of the individual over group goals, whereas collectivistic cultures stress group goals over individual goals. In individualistic cultures, individuals tend to assume responsibility only for themselves and their immediate family. In collectivistic cultures, individuals tend to belong to in-groups that look after them in exchange for the individuals' loyalty.

Hooker (2008) states that in high-context communication, the message cannot be understood without a great deal of background information. Low-context communication spells out more of the information explicitly in the message. All the above is supported by Kiss (2008) who states that even the way we deal with conflict links back to the individualist and collectivistic cultures. Some people most often deal directly with conflicts as they arise. For example, a face-to-face meeting is a customary way to work through problems. In many Eastern countries, open conflict is considered embarrassing or demeaning. Differences are best worked out quietly. Another means might be enlisting a respected third party who can facilitate communication without risking loss of face or being humiliated. Furthermore, Kiss states that from culture to culture, people have different ways of completing tasks. They might have different access to resources, different rewards associated with task completion, different notions of time, and different ideas about how relationship-building and task-oriented work should go together. Asian and Hispanic cultures tend to attach more value to developing relationships at the beginning of shared project, with more emphasis on task completion toward the end.

In addition to the above, Kiss describes that attitudes toward personal disclosure also affect the way we communicate. In some cultures, it is not appropriate to be frank about emotions, the reasons behind a conflict or misunderstanding, or about personal information. Questions that might seem natural to you might seem intrusive to others. The variation among cultures in attitudes toward disclosure is also something to consider before you conclude that you must have an accurate reading of the views, experiences, and goals of the people who you interact with.

## **2.2. Intercultural communication barriers in a higher education context**

When communicating, lecturers often encounter students in the universities who not only use different languages, but who also come from cultures and backgrounds. Because of the differences, misunderstandings may occur in the process of communication and this may have a negative effect on the people around us (Ntuli, 2012). Jeong (2008) argues that communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds may induce breakdowns due to significant dissimilarities between the cultures. The issue of cultural barriers in academic institutions is critical, especially in intercultural interactions. A study done by Wang and Gu, (2005) concluded that when people from different "cultures communicate, cultural barriers do exist that may lead to communi-

ation failure, conflicts and misunderstanding when exchanging ideas” ( p.1) as the students lack pragmatic competence (Woldemariam, 2015).

According to Martinez (2003) we do not know about other cultures, and some do not want to know. There is no doubt that both ignorance (lack of knowledge) and naiveté (lack of sophistication) can be important barriers to intercultural communication. Various scholars such as (Martinez, (2003), Kiss (2008) and Joeng (2008) argue that the main communication barriers in intercultural communication revolves around ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, amongst others. These are barriers because each is constructed around a judgment made before any communication takes place, thus bias influences the communication that follows. All communication has a past, present, and future; barriers are part of the past that influence the communication that takes place now and affect all that follows in the future. In academic contexts, these barriers are often causing of fears and frustrations.

Martinez (2003) explains ethnocentrism as the belief that the behaviours of one’s own cultural group, norms, ways of thinking, and ways of being, are superior to all other cultural groups. This is supported by a study conducted by Kiss (2008) and Joeg (2008) whereby they claim that most of us would like to believe we are open minded and accepting. But in reality, a great number of us find discomfort with those who are different in terms of values, beliefs, and behaviours. We may then evaluate them in a negative light. Ethnocentrism carries devotion to the extreme point where you cannot believe that another culture’s behaviours, norms, ways of thinking, and ways of being are as good or as worthy as your own. We evaluate good and bad, right, and wrong relative to how closely the values, behaviours and ideas of others mirror our own. These scholars believe that ethnocentrism magnifies differences, thus, discouraging students from attempting to interact with others from different cultures. It becomes a barrier in intercultural communication when it prevents us from even trying to see another’s point of view. It also hampers all attempts at empathy.

Secondly Martinez (2003) identifies stereotyping as a communication barrier and this is also supported by a study conducted by Kiss (2008), Dumessa & Godesso (2014) and Joeng (2008). Their studies identified stereotyping as the most significant barrier to effective intercultural communication. Stereotyping is the tendency to categorize and make assumptions about other student or lecturer based on identified characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality, and socio-economic status. Whether we realize it or not (and we often do not), we all stereotype and make assumptions about others at one time or another. Stereotyping is basically oversimplified or distorted views of another race, another ethnic group, or even another culture. Stereotypes are stumbling blocks for communicators because they interfere with the objective viewing of stimuli. In other words, we have a stereotypical preconception of a person from a certain culture, and we interpret his/her behaviour according to this preconception, whether the reason for the behaviour is what we think it is. We shy away from people who are culturally different (therefore students of similar racial and cultural backgrounds tend to group together). These are simply ways of categorizing and generalizing from the overwhelming amount of information we receive daily.

Another study which focused on “technical writing” argues that English courses in the higher education context should incorporate practical exercises, examples and activities that will enable students to write effective technical materials, and English skills and activities that can help them in their professional lives. Third, the students were found to lack confidence in using English as well as having a low motivation to learn the language. Fourth, the university did not have a module or a full-fledged course book for the Technical Report Writing course for engineers. Instructors used the same Technical Report Writing course material used for other departments like law and accounting to teach engineering students. The course material prepared by each instructor, therefore, was discovered not to adequately address the students’

technical report writing needs and it did not contain the dominant features of an ESP material (Tesema and Woldemariam, 2016, p.37).

The problem with stereotypes is that whether they are positive or negative, once they are established, it is difficult to remove them. Sometimes they exist in our subconscious; these are even more difficult to discard because we are less aware of them. We stereotype because it helps us interact with the world more efficiently. According to the study conducted by Kiss (2008), the Social Cognition approach outlines four, largely unconscious human actions that lead to the creation of stereotypes: Firstly, the formation of “US” and “THEM” Groups. This step in the development of stereotypes is the categorization of people into two groups: “us” (in-group) and “them” (out-group). This happens all the time, and we often do not realize it. The groups are formed along a wide variety of diversity dimensions such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, religion, geographic location, family status, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and physical characteristics. The second step consists of the natural tendency to prefer the group of which one is a member (in-group). It makes sense that we would come to prefer the group that we are constantly a part of. The third step is where actual stereotyping takes place. Simply stated, students tend to perceive members of the out-group to be more like one another than members of our in-group (where, of course, we recognize that we are not all the same). This is probably because we can directly experience the diversity (ways in which members are different) within the in-group while we have limited experience interacting with members of the out-group. That is what leads to generalizing about members of the out-group. Once we develop stereotypes about members of different groups, there is a powerful psychological process at work that leads us to maintain these stereotypes. This process, known as expectancy confirmation, consists of the tendency to use instances when stereotypes are supported as “proof” that the stereotype is valid. And once again, this will often happen unconsciously.

A study conducted in the Ethiopian higher education context has confirmed that students are better at identifying what is given to them rather than themselves applying it practically. This means that from the natural data gathered through observation, the students were not using speech acts, or cooperative and politeness principles to interact with their friends and teachers (Hussen and Woldemariam, 2016, p.91). A similar type of study also concluded that English courses must be integrated with other fields of studies. The contents, strategies and tasks in the English teaching manuals must be designed based on the immediate academic and professional needs of students (Mognhode and Woldemariam, 2015, p.190).

According to Martinez (2003) prejudice is a negative attitude toward a cultural group based on little or no experience. Kiss (2008) states that prejudice is caused by the lack of understanding that is frequently present between people from different backgrounds. Joeng (2008) also supports that prejudice indeed is a communication barrier because we make judgments about others without sufficient evidence to substantiate the opinions. Because people may have differences in values, beliefs, methods of reasoning, communication styles, work styles and personality types, communication difficulties will occur.

Discrimination is also a communication barrier identified by Martinez (2003); it is the overt actions one takes to exclude, avoid, or distance oneself from other groups. Discrimination takes stereotypes and prejudice one step further to action, whether overt or covert. Joeng (2008) argues that discrimination between lecturers and students normally arises from an observation of students’ academic achievement and classroom behaviour. However, Pilkington, as cited in Joeng (2008), believes that teacher typification can be based on prior observation of students’ ability and behaviour. You can discriminate against someone subtly by slightly turning away your body when in a conversation, or by avoiding eye contact with them. You can also discriminate against people by hurling verbal insults at them. You can discriminate by using

physical violence, systematically eliminating the group from which the individual comes, or even in extreme cases by using genocide, as when autocratic tyrants exterminate racial or national groups. Discrimination can be interpersonal when you do it against another person, collective (when several individuals or a group perform the discrimination), or institutional (when a business or industry chooses not to serve a particular group of people).

A study conducted in the Ethiopian higher education context found out that that teachers did not bring in outside materials to complement the paucity of intercultural pragmatics contents of the English language textbooks to facilitate the opportunities for teaching and learning pragmatics in the classroom. Evidence for this was 100% of the teachers responded unanimously that they never supplemented the textbooks with additional materials to instruct pragmatics in EFL setting where there were rare opportunities to learning pragmatics outside the classroom (Shankule and Woldemariam, 2015, p.45)

### **2.3. Understanding the cultural practices of foreign and local students to minimize misunderstandings**

Before reviewing the literature on how understanding other students' culture can minimize misunderstandings, it is of essence to understand culture. According to Jandt as cited in Dumessa and Godesso (2014), "culture can be seen as the "way a of living, including behavioural norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, and patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group of large enough to be self-sustaining transmitted over the course of generations" (p.1). According to Axner (2017) culture is a strong part of people's lives. It influences their views, their values, their humour, their hopes, their loyalties, and their worries and fears. So, when you are working with people and building relationships with them, it helps to have some perspective and understanding of their cultures.

Gudykunst as cited in Gitimu (2005) argues that effective intercultural communication is partly based on one's ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty. Anxiety has to do with feelings of discomfort while uncertainty deals with an inability to predict the behaviour of others (Dumessa & Godesso (2014) further state that as cultures vary, misunderstandings and difficulties in intercultural communication are inevitable. If we are aware of these differences, we are certain to face difficulties in communicating with people from other cultures. To increase students' cultural fluency, they should be aware of and sensitive to different values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions in diverse aspects of life as well as culturally different modes of behaviour. Successful communication is a prerequisite for effective transfer of knowledge in school. A rich repertoire of verbal and nonverbal behaviours appropriate to the intercultural situation as well as effective capabilities to react sensitively to fellow communicators from other cultures is a necessity in education (Gitimu, 2005). "Effective knowledge transfer requires lecturers and students to communicate effectively which requires them to communicate linguistically, inter-culturally, and interpersonally. For effective communication to take place, lecturers should also acquaint students with the target culture. This will help to reduce cross-cultural communication barriers/misunderstandings, and make them communicate competently, both linguistically and cross-culturally" (Wang & Gu, n.d.).

According to Martinez (2003), for accurate communication to occur, sender-receivers must operate from the same perceptual point of view. This is usually not a problem when we interact with people from our own race or culture; however, when we communicate with someone from a different race or background, we must realize that this person will be operating from an entirely different point of view. The above is supported by Quappe & Cantatore (2007) who state that cultural awareness becomes central when we must interact with people from other cultures. People see, interpret,

and evaluate things in different ways. What is considered an appropriate behaviour in one culture is often inappropriate in another. Misunderstandings may arise when one uses one's own meanings to make sense of the reality. "Communication requires the understanding of the intended meaning" (Eticha and Woldemariam, 2018,p.2249).

Ntuli (2015), in a study conducted in South Africa, argues that in our interactions, we sometimes come across people who not only use different nonverbal cues and speak different languages from ours, but who also come from cultures and backgrounds which are different. Because of our differences, misunderstandings may occur in the process of communication and this may have a negative effect on the people around us. Nonverbal gesticulation forms part of communicative behaviour and includes body language such as facial expressions like smiling, frowning, eye contact or different types of physical gestures. Intercultural communication takes place in various forms of interactions, for instance it involves our beliefs, behaviour, language, and non-verbal cues amongst others.

Sottitat (2017) supports the above and argues that intercultural communication can be difficult in some countries because what is acceptable in one culture may be unacceptable in another. When people are immersed in an environment where facial expressions such as eye contact and body gestures are alien to their own experience, they may suffer from disorientation and frustration. Therefore, it is important to learn the body language of different cultures. Herring, as cited in Gitimu (2005), concluded that nonverbal communication is really part of communication itself. Cultural misunderstandings and miscommunications can be greatly reduced by an increased awareness of cultural differences in nonverbal communication patterns. He defined nonverbal communication as behaviour that transcends verbal and written words. Herring (1990) states that many ethnic groups use nonverbal communications more extensively than they use verbal communication, especially in expressions of feeling and attitudes. Kiss (2008) argues that nonverbal behaviour arises from our cultural common sense - our ideas about what is appropriate, normal, and effective. To communicate in relationships, we use different systems of understanding – gestures, posture, silence, special relations, emotional expression, touch, physical appearance, and other nonverbal cues. Cultures also attribute different degrees of importance to verbal and nonverbal behaviour. All communication is cultural and draws on the ways we have learned to speak and give nonverbal messages. We do not always communicate the same way from day to day, since factors like context, individual personality, and mood interact with the variety of cultural influences and choices. Communication is interactive, so an important influence on its effectiveness is our relationship with others. Perfecting ourselves in effective communication skills can ease our move through conflicts. A culturally fluent approach to conflict means working diligently to understand these and other ways that communication varies across cultures and applying these understandings to enhance relationships across differences.

#### **2.4. Theoretical framework**

Many researchers have written about Cultural Identity Theory (CIT), however, for the purpose of this paper, the researchers looked at what Chen (2016), Orbe & Harris (2008) had discussed. The Cultural Identity Theory was developed by Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas in 1988. Cultural Identity Theory explains why a person is the way he/she is. It explains why a person acts and behaves the way he/she does. It further provides a productive framework for acknowledging the existing impact of complexities of cultural identities and intercultural communication. One of the main tenets of the theory states that everyone has multiple cultural identities that are formed through communication. The CIT was originally conceived as an interpretive inquiry into cultural identities and was extended to incorporate a critical perspective. In this research, the theory has been employed to develop the research instruments, has guid-

ed the review work, and finally shaped the data analysis. It has given us the roadmap to conceptualize the entire problem and gave us the lenses to conclude and recommend feasible solutions.

## **2.5. Research Methods**

### ***2.5.1. Research Design***

Following Cultural Identity Theory, this study used a mixed research design to investigate intercultural communication between lecturers and students at NUST. The researchers used mixed research method because it helped with the triangulation of data. Furthermore, since the researchers used questionnaires which consisted of both open and close ended questions, this research method helped the researchers to accurately analyse the data.

### ***2.5.2. Study Population, Sampling Procedures and Sample Size***

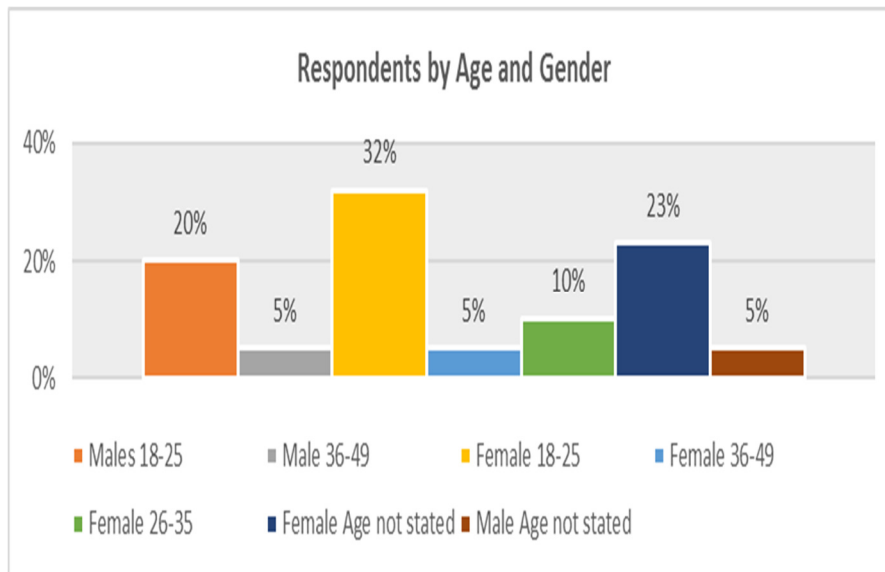
The main respondents of this study were the lecturers and first year students in the Faculty of Human Sciences. The study investigated intercultural communication interactions between lecturers and first year students in the same Faculty. The respondent's cultural background was identified by determining their country of origin. The study was conducted in Windhoek at the NUST Main Campus. The sampling took place in the form of purposive sampling. The researchers used this sampling method because it provided for the greatest number of possible samples. The study population was not too large; thus, it granted all respondents an equal chance of being selected. However, the weakness of this method was that there were not enough minority subgroups of interest for the study. When we stated this study, the total population of first year students in the Faculty of Human Sciences was 660 and the lecturers were 105 (NUST Institutional Planning, 2017). However, the researchers only included a total of 40 respondents who were purposively selected. Out of the 40 respondents, 10 lecturers who dealt with first year students were purposefully selected to be part of the study. A total of 11 foreign respondents were included in the study and the other 19 were local Namibian students. Cultural diversity was the main selection criteria.

## **3.0. Major Findings and Discussions**

The students and lecturers who participated in the study were selected from various divisions within the Faculty of Human Sciences. This section presents the data collected through the in-depth interviews and questionnaires. The first part will describe the basic information/data that was derived from the study and the second part will outline and discuss the findings through each of the three research questions stated earlier. The section will further draw on the literature to identify similarities to the real-life scenario experienced at NUST.

### ***3.1. Demographic Data***

This section outlines the demographic information of the respondents such as gender composition and age distribution. The researchers purposively selected first year students and lecturers who are teaching first year students.



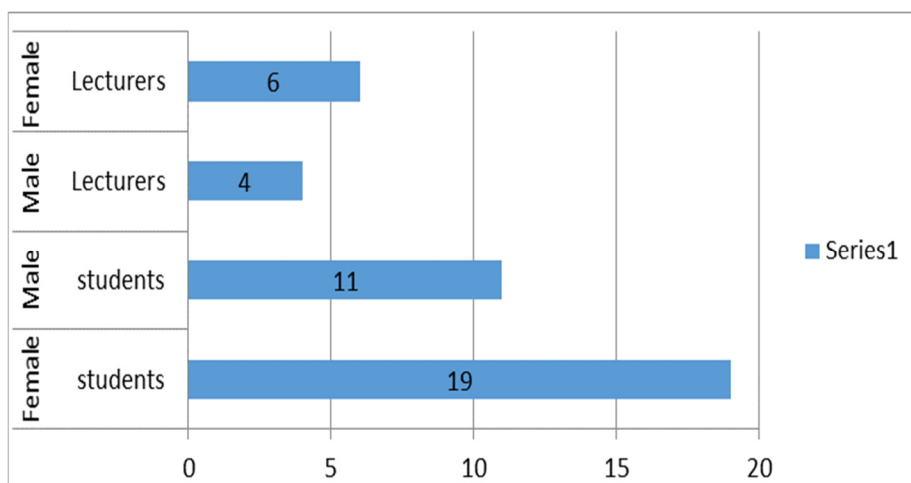
**Figure 1: Respondents by age and gender**

Figure 1 represents the age and gender composition of the respondents. It shows that 20% of the respondents were between 18-25 years were males, whilst only 5 % of the male respondents were between 36-49 years old. Figure 1 further shows that 32% of the respondents were between the ages of 18-25 years were females, while another 5 % were between the age of 36-49 and 10% of the female respondents were between the ages of 26-35. Furthermore, the figure shows that 23% of females and 5% of males did not indicate their ages during the data collection process; this was since when the researchers conducted the interviews, the respondents were not asked to indicate their age group.

The table above clearly shows that there were more female students who participated in the study. It is evident from the statistics that about 52 % of the respondents from the ones indicated their age group falls within the category of the 18-25 years of age, while only a mere 10% fall in the category of 36-49 years. Further analysis of the demographic data shows that from the respondents who participated in the study, only 10 % of the females were in the category of 26-35 years whilst none were recorded for the male counterparts.

The overall statistics shows that there were more females (approximately 70% participated in the study) compared to the male counterparts who were approximately 30%. This finding is supported by the statistics provided by the Institutional Planning Department of NUST which show that there are 346 females and 314 male first year students in the faculty. Finally, since the study focused on the first-year intake, it is evident that the number of young people between the ages of 18-25 years is higher compared to the other age groups as previously discussed.

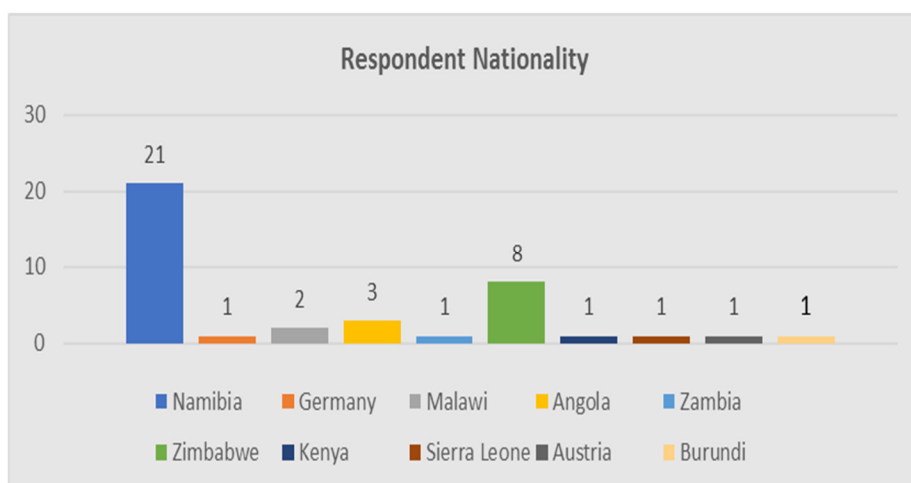
This section outlines the demographic information of the respondents such as gender composition and occupation/designations. The researchers purposefully selected first year students and lecturers who were teaching first year students.



**Figure 2: Respondents by gender and occupation**

Figure 2 presents the gender composition and occupation of the respondents. It shows that a total of 19 female students participated in the study compared to the 11 male students. It further shows that a total of 6 female lecturers participated compared to the 11 male lecturers. The above concurs with the overall statistics that more females participated in the study compared to their male counterparts.

The figure below presents the nationalities of the respondents who participated in the study. This section is significant because the study focused on intercultural communication among lecturers and first year students in a university context. Since intercultural communication refers to the interaction between people from different cultures (Dainton and Zelly, 2005), it is important that the nationalities of the respondents are included as it helps to comprehend the detailed analysis.



**Figure 3: Respondent's Nationality**

The figures in the above graph are inclusive of lecturers who teach first year courses and first year students within the Faculty of Human Sciences. The figure

shows that about 52.5 % of the respondents were Namibians while 20 % from Zimbabwe and 7.5 % from Angola. It further shows that Germany, Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Austria, and Burundi were equally represented with a total of 2.5 % each.

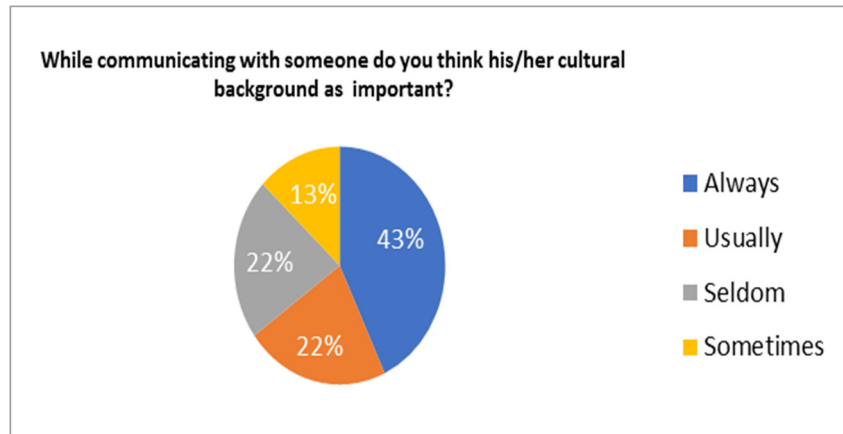
Although NUST had a total of 24 foreign students in the Faculty of Human Sciences in 2017, the researchers could only include 11 in the study. This was because some of the students were studying via distance while at least two students had dropped out during the year. The researchers also included 21 Namibians in the study because intercultural communication does not only occur between foreign students and lecturers, but also occurs when people from different cultures communicate.

### 3.2. Major Observations

In the sections below, the researchers will present a detailed discussion of the findings in line with the three research questions. The researchers reviewed the literature to investigate the impact of intercultural communication on lecturers and students. Real life scenarios experienced at NUST are also discussed hereunder. To obtain the data required to answer the three research questions, the researchers interviewed 17 respondents inclusive of six lecturers. Questionnaires were also administered to 23 respondents inclusive of four lecturers to substantiate the qualitative data.

#### 3.2.1. Research Question One

As previously stated, the researchers wanted to ascertain how cultural differences impact the teaching and learning environment at NUST, specifically in the Faculty of Human Sciences. For gaining an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of communication between lecturers and students, 23 questionnaires were distributed to lecturers (4) and students (19). To answer this question, the researchers asked the respondents' opinions such as "While communicating with someone, do you think his/her cultural background as important? Please justify your answer." The chart below gives an overview of the responses:



**Fig 4: The importance of cultural background during intercultural communication**

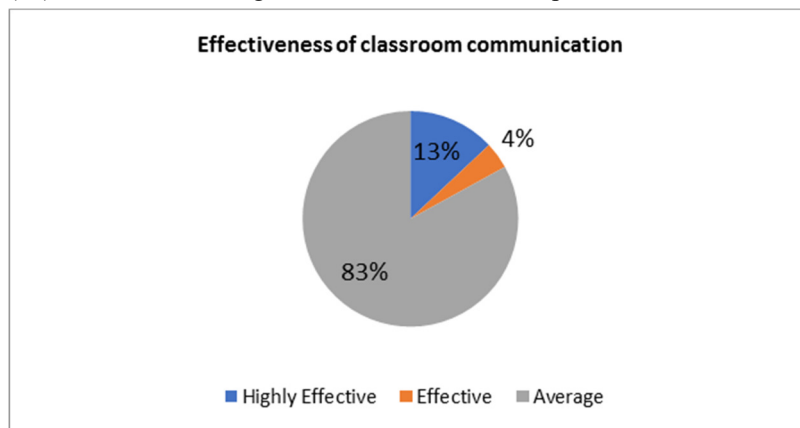
The chart above shows that 43 % of the respondents indicated that they "always" think about the cultural background of the other party when engaging in intercultural interactions. Another 22 % indicated that they "usually" think about it while 22 % indicated they "seldom" think about it, while the other 13 % indicated that they only think

about it “sometimes.” Forty three percent of the respondents indicated that they think about the cultural background of the other party because social interactions and ways of communicating are informed by the cultural values and norms that are rooted deep in the students or lecturers’ hearts. They further indicated that knowledge of cultural background is important for them because their own perceptions and ways of communicating is influenced by their own cultural values and norms. The respondents indicated that thinking about the cultural background of the other party helps them to determine the type of communication style when engaged in dialogue. The other 57% of the respondents indicated that they only think about the cultural background of the other parties to guide and help them when engaged in intercultural interactions.

The above concurs with Melinte (2003) and Toomey (1996) who stated that people use their own cultural rules and values to guide their words and their deeds, even thoughts, and that they also use them as standards to judge the words and deeds of others. This is mainly because the national culture is so deeply imprinted in the heart of the people of that nation.

### 3.2.2. Research Question Two

As previously stated, the researchers wanted to determine which communication barriers are experienced when lecturers and students communicate and how they affect the communication flow process. To answer this question, the researchers asked opinions, such as ‘What do you think are the main causes of communication barriers in intercultural interactions?’ ‘How do these communication barriers affect communication in academic contexts?’ ‘Which types of misunderstandings are most encountered in intercultural interactions?’ ‘How effective is the present communication between lecturers and first year students (foreign and local)?’ ‘What are the most common communication barriers/hurdles encountered when communicating with lecturer/student (foreign and local students) (things that affect the flow of information, instructions, ideas, suggestions etc.)?’ The questions allowed the researchers to gain general knowledge and the opinion of each respondent. After conducting interviews and collecting the questionnaires, the researchers began to identify patterns from the data collected. To gaining an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of communication between lecturers and students, 23 questionnaires were distributed to four lecturers (4) and nineteen students (19). The chart below gives an overview of the responses.



**Chart 2: Effectiveness of classroom communication**

The chart above shows that out of 23 respondents who answered the questionnaire, 83 % indicated that the communication between lecturers and first year students is average currently. During the interview students indicated that this is because students do

not always understand the tasks given, which leads to a lot of repetition in classes. One contributing factor which will be discussed at a later stage is the issue of English that is used as the only medium for communication/instruction in higher education context in Namibia. Some indicated that most of them came directly from high schools, and immediately were exposed to grapple with the complexities of technical and scientific vocabulary and expected to comprehend the discussions and hence, 83 % scored classroom communication as average.

Thirteen percent of the students indicated that classroom communication is highly effective and 5% of the respondents indicated it is effective because there is a two-way flow of communication. For instance, Respondent A said: *“I feel classroom communication is effective because lecturers take time to listen and respond when we ask questions, and also things are being repeated a lot if we don’t understand and hence, I believe it’s effective.”* We noticed that the vocabulary command of this respondent was excellent that is why the respondent understood classroom communication as effective.

The researchers interviewed 17 respondents. The questions they were asked included: *“Which types of misunderstandings are mostly encountered in intercultural interactions?”* Options were provided as follows: *verbal – misunderstanding of words or language used, non-verbal – body language or gestures and vocal – tone of voice.* The researchers only interviewed 17 respondents because the researchers were satisfied with the responses provided as they had 100 % matching patterns.

**Table 1: Types of misunderstandings mostly encountered in intercultural interactions?**

Which types of misunderstandings are mostly encountered in intercultural interactions?	Response from Lecturers	Total %	Response from Students	Total %	Total
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%	No of respondents
Verbal – misunderstanding of words or language used	6	35 %	11	65%	17
Non-verbal – body language or gestures					
Non-verbal – body language or gestures and vocal – (tone of voice)	0		0	0	0

The table shows that 100 % of the respondents are of the opinion that both verbal (misunderstanding of words or language used) and non-verbal (body language or gestures) misunderstandings are most common in intercultural communication interactions. Upon further enquiry of the responses, the respondents indicated that language causes the biggest misunderstanding because of words or phrases that are used across different cultures. For instance, Respondent B said, *“language has always been perceived as a link between people, but it can also constitute a barrier in intercultural interactions. Across cultures, some words and phrases are used in different ways so communication between cultures which do not share the same language is more difficult”.* Respondent C said, *“Non-verbal areas cause conflict because of certain signs that might be misinterpreted which may lead to misunderstandings, embarrassment and even conflict.”*

As shown above, none of the respondents thought that non-verbal cues – body language or gestures and vocal cues – tone of voice, contribute to intercultural communication misunderstandings. The contributing factor for this is because of past

experiences of the respondents. When the same respondents were given questionnaires and asked if they had ever participated in an intercultural interaction which ended up in a misunderstanding, all (100 %) respondents answered yes and cited language (words used) and non-verbal gestures (body language and gestures), as a contributing factor. For instance, Respondent D stated, *“when I first started to work at NUST, previously known as Polytechnic of Namibia, I could never understand why certain students did not make eye contact with me when I was addressing them, until I had to enquire and understand that it was a culturally motivated behaviour. At first when I did not know I got angry, and the student could not also understand why I was getting angry. This in its sense showed that indeed non-verbal gestures can cause/contribute to misunderstandings.”*

The above quotes support the findings of the literature that was reviewed; cultural barriers play a critical factor, especially in intercultural interactions. It is evident from the above that misunderstandings do exist, and this may lead to communication failures, conflicts and misunderstandings when exchanging ideas. From the above, it is apparent that culture plays a role in moulding our non-verbal behaviours which is an important part of the communication process (Matsumoto and Takeuchi, 1998). In the case of Faculty of Human Sciences, lecturers and students come from over nine different countries, use different languages, come from different cultures and backgrounds, and communicate daily. For instance, in one of the studies, Jeong (2008) argues that communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds may induce breakdowns in harmony due to significant dissimilarities between the cultures.

In today’s competitive global economy, frequent cross-border movements of people result in a growing diverse community; be it in workplaces, educational institutions and/or in society at large. As the trend indicates, due to increasing intercultural interactions between cultures, breakdown in communication is inevitable; and this leads to communication barriers in intercultural interactions. The researchers asked 40 respondents: *“What do you think are the main causes of communication barriers in intercultural interactions when lecturers and students (local and foreign) communicate?”* Data collected from the interviews and questionnaires were summarized as follows:

**Table 2: Main communication barriers in intercultural higher education context**

SN	Main communication barriers in intercultural interactions	Response rate (%)
1.	Language – use of English as a medium of communication	60%
2.	Anxiety and fear	10%
3.	Generalizations including prejudice	10%
4.	Poor Listening skills (Noise: distractions such as cellophane use; Unclear messages)	2.5%
5.	Physical separation - the space between lecturers and students during classes	2.5%
6.	Lack of knowledge of others’ cultural background/ Ignorance	15%
Total	<b>100%</b>	

The above table shows that most of the respondents (60%) indicated that in their opinion the main communication barrier in intercultural interactions is the language aspect, especially the use of English as a medium of communication. Respondents indicated that the type of unfamiliar vocabulary used also contributes to language being the main communication barrier. For instance, Respondent E said, “*language is the main barrier because sometimes we don’t understand what is being explained, but we are afraid to ask questions because of the poor English we speak.*” At times, they are unable to express themselves as they would in their native languages. Some struggle with building enough confidence to feel comfortable conversing in English.

A total of 10 % of the respondents cited anxiety and fear as a communication barrier while another 10% cited generalizations/prejudice as barriers to classroom communication. Some indicated that because of past experiences or based on the opinions of external parties, one forms assumptions about individuals without the facts. Anxiety and fear were cited as a communication barrier because some students felt that some lecturers do not look approachable based on their body language and the non-verbal gestures they tend to exude. According to Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern (2002) as cited in McKeiver (2013), in intercultural communication, anxiety is partially due to communication obstacles such as a student’s language ability, differences in expression of emotion, and differences in verbal and non-verbal communication style. Members of the “in-group” and members of the “out-group” may both experience feelings of impatience, frustration, and suspicion, even in anticipation of the encounter, which can then increase anxiety in both parties. For instance, Respondent F said, “*We sometimes fear to approach lecturers because they sometimes look irritated when one seeks clarity.*” This basically means fear of lecturers might lead to communication hiccups because students end up leaving the classroom with misconceptions of the discussions. The findings of the study concur with the literature where stereotypes/generalizations and prejudice were cited as barriers to intercultural interactions. As indicated earlier, Joeng (2008) stated that because these two aspects, stereotypes, and prejudice, influence our judgements about others without sufficient evidence, it leads to communication glitches. The main contributor to the above barriers is the fact that individuals involved in intercultural interactions have differences in values, beliefs, methods of reasoning, communication styles, work styles and personality types which all form the basis of our interactions with others.

A total of 2.5 % of the respondents cited poor listening skills and noise (distractions such as cell phone use) as communication barriers in intercultural interactions. For instance, respondent G stated that “*students tend to be preoccupied with other activities such as using their cell phones in classes which distracts their attention from what is being discussed. When this happens, students tend to misinterpret instructions.*” The above directly have an influence on the understanding and perception of messages. Another 2.5 % cited physical separation - the space between lecturers and students during classes (body distance) - as a communication barrier. Because of differing cultural backgrounds, some respondents felt they need closer interactions with lecturers, but because of the size of class, that is not always possible.

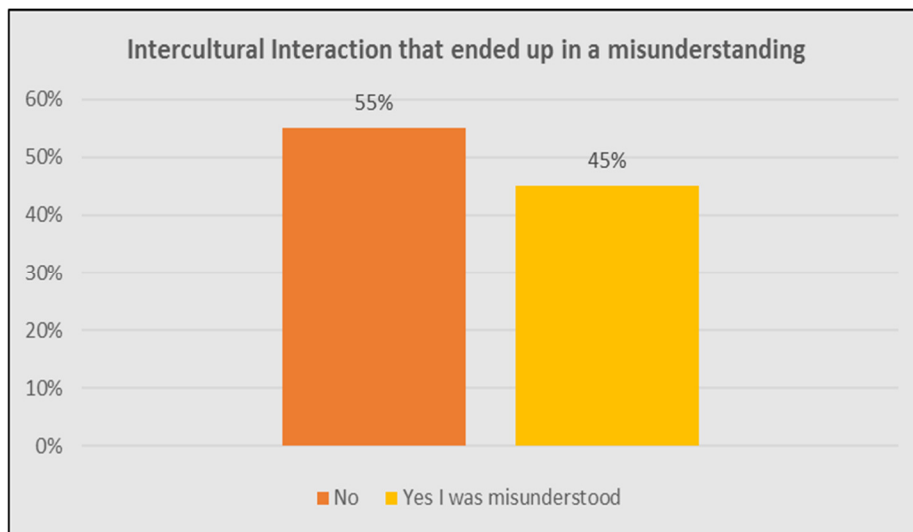
Lastly, 15 % of the respondents indicated that lack of knowledge of others’ cultural background and ignorance constitute a communication barrier in higher education context. Some indicated that when engaging in intercultural interactions, they assume similarity instead of differences, which leads to misunderstandings in some cases. This finding is supported by Daniel (2003) who stated that when we assume similarity between cultures, we are caught unaware by important differences which leads us to behave according to the only thing we know, our own culture. The above finding is supported by Martinez (2003) who stated that we do not know about other cultures, and some do not want to know. There is no doubt that both ignorance (lack of

knowledge) and naiveté (lack of sophistication), can be important barriers to intercultural communication.

In relation to the above discussion, respondents were asked how the above-mentioned communication barriers affect communication. The respondents indicated that the above-mentioned elements are categorized as barriers because they hamper effective communication which causes the original message not to be understood in the way intended by the sender. All respondents (100%) indicated that the overall influence of these communication barriers lead to cognitive constraints and behaviour which ultimately leads to misconceptions and sometimes conflict.

### 3.1.3. Research Question Three

Basically, the researchers wanted to determine what steps can be taken to minimize conflict or what students and lecturers can do to mitigate or minimize intercultural communication misunderstandings. In order to answer this question, the researchers asked opinions, by asking questions such as *Have you ever been in an intercultural interaction which ended up in a misunderstanding? What did you do about it? When interacting with students from other cultures what do you do to ensure communication is effective? What do you think can be done to improve and overcome communication barriers encountered during intercultural interactions?* By asking the above questions, the researchers were able to gather how lecturers and student generally dealt with intercultural communication misunderstandings, and what they recommended can be done to minimize such misunderstandings. After conducting interviews and collecting questionnaires, the researchers began to identify patterns from the data collected as follows:



**Figure 3: Have you ever engaged in an intercultural interaction which ended up in a misunderstanding?**

The above figure shows that 55% of the respondents indicated that they had never engaged in an intercultural interaction that ended up in a misunderstanding whilst only 45 % indicated that they were engaged in intercultural interactions that ended up in misunderstandings. Forty five percent of the respondents indicated that they were misunderstood when they interacted with people from different cultural backgrounds. Upon further enquiry into how they dealt with the misunderstanding, the respondents indicated that they had to apologize and seek clarity from the person they talked to. Some of the respondents indicated that it is important to establish good relationships

with people to address misunderstandings amicably. Others indicated that the misunderstandings were mainly caused by lack of understanding of different cultures and language (jargon words) used during the interaction. Some of the respondents indicated that the intercultural misunderstanding was dealt with by probing and responding to questions to ensure mutual understanding of the intercultural encounters. Others indicated that they focused on the issue at hand (matter of discussion) without involving personal feelings and emotions.

Cultural differences across societies can be very sensitive for the parties involved and making assumptions can be dangerous. In relation to the above, the respondents were asked: *When interacting with people from other cultures; what do you do to ensure communication is effective? The respondents were further asked; What do you think can be done to improve/overcome communication barriers encountered during intercultural interactions?* The respondents underscored the importance of intercultural awareness and noted that at NUST, Faculty of Human Sciences, cultural differences exist because people from different cultures engage in dialogue daily.

All (100%) respondents indicated that to overcome communication barriers in intercultural interactions, first and foremost, it is paramount for us to acknowledge cultural differences and to try to learn about each other's cultures as this strategy will help to create a conducive learning and working environment. The above is supported by the literature that was reviewed as scholars such as Axner (2017) state that, to build communities that are successful at improving conditions and resolving problems, we need to understand and appreciate many cultures, establish relationships with people from cultures other than our own, and build strong alliances with different cultural groups. The finding is also supported by Gitimu (2005) who states that to successfully communicate cross culturally, knowledge and understanding of cultural factors such as values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour, should be acquired. Some of the respondents indicated that NUST should organize seminars to educate and sensitize staff and students about cultural differences and to encourage people not to make premature generalizations based on previous experiences. The respondents also indicated that we should always be flexible and accommodating when engaging with people from different cultures. For instance, respondent H said, *"We need to be more patient and understanding and try to meet each other halfway to make life easier for all"*. In terms of the language aspect, the respondents indicated that to overcome this barrier, the lecturers should try to use a level of English that is easy to comprehend. However, on the other hand, the lecturers indicated that to overcome the language barrier, students should invest time by visiting the library and reading as much as they can to improve their level of vocabulary. This will aid them in understanding the level of English used at university.

The respondents further indicated that to overcome intercultural communication barriers, it is imperative for all parties to exercise effective listening skills. This should be done by keeping calm and listening to what the other party is saying without pre-empting the speaker. The students indicated that lecturers should listen to their concerns and answer questions without judging, pre-empting and embarrassing students. The respondents also indicated that all parties must be cognizant of the use of non-verbal cues in intercultural interactions as the meanings are not always universal in all cultures.

#### **4.0. Conclusions and Recommendations**

##### **4.1. Conclusions**

Intercultural communication is a common day-day activity in the Faculty of Human Sciences because people from different cultural backgrounds engage in dialogue daily. The conclusion of this paper is that generally people think about the cultural background of the other party when conversing with people from different cultures. How-

ever, the cultural difference does not have any significant influence on the teaching and learning process in the Faculty. This paper observed that communication between lecturers and students was mostly influenced by language, rather than cultural background/differences. In general, the respondents demonstrated cultural tolerance and eagerness to learn and adapt their behaviour and communication style which is uniquely Namibian. Both lecturers and students are aware of the cultural differences but try to accommodate the differences. This study further found that students were quite accustomed to one another and socialized easily with others from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Similarly, the lecturers were also found to be accustomed to interacting with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In view of the above, this paper concludes that cultural differences did not have a significant impact on the teaching and learning process. It is evident from the previous discussions that students and lecturers conversed, and that knowledge and skills transfer took place, regardless of the cultural background of individual respondents.

During the study, communication barriers such as stereotypes/generalizations, anxiety, poor listening skills, non-verbal gestures, and language, were identified as communication barriers. However, this paper concludes that most of these communication barriers are not directly related to cultural differences, but rather to the issue of language. This paper therefore concludes that language was the main cause of communication breakdown between the respondents, specifically due to the use of English as a medium of instruction which directly influenced the flow of communication between lecturers and students. This is because the respondents felt that they could not express their thoughts and opinions freely.

In view of the above it is evident that there is no significant breakdown in the intercultural communication between lecturers and students.

The researchers' general intention to identify general measures which can help to minimize intercultural communication misunderstandings, was met. This paper provides general measures that the Faculty of Human Sciences could use to handle and deal with intercultural communication problems that were identified in Chapter Four. Becoming an effective intercultural communicator is neither a personal choice nor a talent. Since we now live in a global village with the global issue of cultural differences, it is essential that everyone becomes competent in intercultural communication. To become competent in intercultural communication, people need to gain knowledge of other cultures, maintain a positive attitude towards others from different cultures and acquire interpersonal skills.

This paper concludes that achieving this competence will occur through learning the necessary skills and knowledge. Such learning will facilitate the co-existence of different cultures with fewer breakdowns and maximize the advantages to be gained by sharing the most beneficial aspects of culture. However, it is important to clarify that learning about other cultures does not necessarily mean that one must internalize the norms of another culture and accept them. It only provides a channel through which to learn and manage intercultural misunderstandings.

#### **4.2. Recommendations**

The findings of this study have added knowledge of intercultural communication to the Faculty of Human Sciences at NUST. These findings could be used by lecturers, students and other researchers concerning intercultural communication. During the research process it became evident that there are no major cultural differences that impact the teaching and learning process in the Faculty of Human Sciences at NUST. However, the researchers recommend that one should always be flexible and open minded when conversing with people from different cultures. Generally, the researchers recommends that cultural awareness and understanding play a key role, hence, all

lecturers and students should become culturally competent to facilitate effective knowledge transfer. The researchers reiterate that it is of paramount importance that all individuals should recognize that culture is the central/starting point of our communication, hence, one should learn to respect and appreciate the culture of other people one engage with.

Non-verbal communication is considered as an indispensable component of human interaction and it bears close relationship with culture. Each culture has a set of norms regarding the appropriateness of different types of language and paralinguistic factors. However, the non-verbal communication is often overlooked. This study suggests that non-verbal communication course should be included in all programmes to enable students and lecturers to become fully competent in intercultural interactions. Since non-verbal communication is used in everyday communication, therefore, it is a prerequisite to acquire intercultural communication competence and sociolinguistic competence (Woldemariam, 2018).

It is evident that language is the dominant communication barrier, and the researchers understand how difficult it is for a person to frequently switch from their home language to English. Therefore, it is recommended that compulsory English introductory courses should be offered to all first-year students in the faculty, regardless of the programme they register for. This will help first year students to understand the level of English and vocabulary that is expected of them as university students. It is a huge transition for students to move from high school to university; the researchers thus recommend that lecturers should use more common words that convey the academic message in simpler terms, especially in the first semester. On the other hand, since NUST offers language classes for beginners; it is further recommended that students who struggle with English as a medium of instruction should enrol for extra language classes to help them to effectively communicate with lecturers and fellow classmates.

The researchers acknowledge the use of repetition by lecturers as they realize that most students do not learn something the first time, they hear it. Hence, they need to hear the same message over and over before they fully grasp it. The researchers recommend that the lecturers should continue to use the technique of repetition and not expect students to grasp everything the first time they are taught it. The researchers also recognize that lecturers frequently check for understanding to ascertain if what they said is what was understood, hence, the researchers would like to congratulate the lecturers on their good work and advise that it should be an on-going process.

In terms of the other minor communication barriers such as anxiety/fear that were identified in Chapter Four, students should be encouraged to express their views and opinions on a subject, even if they cannot effectively articulate themselves in English. Also, the lecturers should reiterate the fact that there are no stupid questions as a way of motivating students to speak out, ask questions, obtain answers, and learn more.

The researchers further recommend that lecturers should be more approachable to make first year students feel comfortable. When the lecturers are approachable, it makes students feel comfortable and they feel that they are welcome to ask questions. It also allows them to take ownership of their learning, thereby overcoming the fear and anxiety they experience when conversing in English.

In terms of the poor listening skills and noise or distraction barriers which were identified earlier, the researchers recommend that lecturers should work hard to develop engaging lessons with interesting and relevant activities. Also, lecturers should compile thought-provoking assignments, creative projects and use technology to enhance lessons which would ultimately enrich communication and interaction experiences. By doing so, the students will not get bored and will not be tempted to fiddle with cell phones. Another mechanism that is recommended is to ask students to

put all cell phones on silent mode and place them in a box during lessons to avoid unnecessary noise or distractions.

Assuming similarities instead of differences is a natural thing to do if you do not have any information about a culture. Assuming that a culture is like your own can cause you to ignore important differences. It does not also help to do the opposite, that is, to assume that everything is different because this will lead to overlooking similarities between cultures. In view of the above, this study recommends that it is best when lecturers and students encounter a new culture to assume nothing and rather ask what the customs are. By doing so intercultural communication misunderstandings can easily be minimized or even avoided.

The research findings clearly demonstrate that NUST has created a conducive environment that tolerates and promotes intercultural communication where everyone is respected and treated as an equal, regardless of his or her cultural background. This is reinforced through activities such as the NUST annual cultural festival where the university dedicates time and resources to celebrate and embrace cultural diversity. This provides students and staff with knowledge of different cultures. By doing so, the institution strives to encourage positive attitudes towards people from different backgrounds by practicing and living the principle of respecting and appreciating diversity.

The researchers recommend that, to maximise intercultural interactions, it is incumbent upon both lecturers and students to become culturally sensitive, and to be cognizant of the fact that both verbal and nonverbal communication is often influenced by cultural backgrounds. It is, therefore, necessary to be more mindful and aware of thoughts and ways of communicating when engaged in dialogue with people from different cultures. Hence, it is recommended that lecturers and students should expand on their knowledge of what they know and explore what they do not know. Taking the initiative to increase their intercultural competence will create a culturally sensitive learning environment for all.

Finally, the researchers recommend that lecturers and students should not allow past experiences to cloud their judgement when communicating with people from other cultures. They should strive to learn as much as they can about the relevant cultures, their norms, values, and beliefs as well as non-verbal communication gestures, and apply these understandings to ease the dialogue process and to enhance relationships. The above mechanisms will help every person involved in intercultural communication to gain a clearer understanding of the perspective of the people they converse with. The researchers further recommend that, in general, respondents should not assume similarity of cultures. Instead, they must try to recognize and embrace the cultural differences that exist.

### *Correspondence*

H. Z. Woldemariam, Associate Professor (Applied Linguistics)  
Department of Communication, FHS  
Namibia University of Science and Technology  
Email: hwoldemariam@nust.na

P. P. Witbeen, Postgraduate Student  
Department of Communication, FHS  
Namibia University of Science and Technology

## References

Axner, M. (2017). Chapter 27. cultural competence in a multicultural world section 1. understanding culture and diversity in building communities. 1994-2021 The University of Kansas. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/culture-and-diversity/main>

Daniel, J. (2003). Chapter four: barriers to intercultural communication. [https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/5245\\_Jandt\\_Final\\_Pages\\_Chapter\\_4.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/5245_Jandt_Final_Pages_Chapter_4.pdf).

Eid, M, Nahon, S., Isaac, A , Rukhsana. (2011). Editorial: Multi-cultural, multi- ethnic, and multi-faith communication. *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition*, 4 (1), 1-4.

Eticha, D. and Woldemariam, H.Z. (2018). The pragmatic knowledge of university lecturers: a case study. *International journal of research in social science. vol. 8 (1), pp. 30-45*. [http://www.ijmra.us/project%20doc/2018/IJRSS\\_JANUARY2018/IJMRA-12854.pdf](http://www.ijmra.us/project%20doc/2018/IJRSS_JANUARY2018/IJMRA-12854.pdf).

Gitimu, P.N. (2005). Intercultural communication: its importance to various career fields and perspective by various authors. <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=ojwed>.

Hooker, J. (2008). Cultural differences in business communication. <http://public.tepper.cmu.edu/jnh/businessCommunication.pdf>.

Hussen, G. H. and Woldemariam, H.Z. (2016). An evaluation of the pragmatic competence of year one student of school of humanities and law: a case study. *NAWA journal of language and communication*. 10 (1). 64-94. <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=39628352-705a-4254-aff5-9dec7484516c%40sessionmgr120>.

Jeong, K., (2008). A case study of intercultural communication in multicultural classroom in the Brisbane Metropolitan area. [http://eprints.qut.edu.au/17806/1/Min\\_Jeong\\_Ko\\_Thesis.pdf](http://eprints.qut.edu.au/17806/1/Min_Jeong_Ko_Thesis.pdf).

Johnson, R. (1975.). ESL teacher education and intercultural communication: discomfort as a learning tool. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ505244.pdf>.

Johnson, R.B. & Onwuegbuzi, A.J. (2004). Mixed methods research: a research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher* s, 33 (7).

Kiss, G. (2008). A theoretical approach to intercultural communication. *AARMS COMMUNICATION*, 7 (3), 435–443.

Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*. Sage Publications. Washington DC.

Liu, J., Rau, P.L.P. & Schulz, B. Culture and student-faculty communication in higher education: implications for the design of educational communication tools. Tsinghua University.

Martinez, S. (2003). Chapter three. intercultural communication. [http://personales.upv.es/mcandel/Hybels9\\_Ch3.pdf](http://personales.upv.es/mcandel/Hybels9_Ch3.pdf).

Melinte, I.E. (2012). Cultural transfer and the cross-cultural impact of foreign languages. *Journal of Cultural and Linguistic Communication* (Vol 2), pp58—63. [http://www.ijcr.eu/articole/58\\_8%20CULTURAL%20TRANSFER%20.....pdf](http://www.ijcr.eu/articole/58_8%20CULTURAL%20TRANSFER%20.....pdf).

Mbambo, D.E. (2009). CHAPTER 3: research methodology. <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/2127/04chapter3.pdf>.

McKeiver, K. (2013). Identifying barriers to effective intercultural communication. <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Identifying-Barriers-to-Effective-Intercultural-Communication.aspx>.

Monghnode, T. and Woldemariam, H.Z. (2015). The English language needs of business students at Adama Science and Technology University, Ethiopia. *NAWA journal of language and communication*. Vol. 9 (1) 150--193. <https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-435095414/7-the-english-language-needs-of-business-students>.

Namibia University of Science and Technology, NUST History. <http://www.nust.na/?q=about-us/history-nust>.

Ntuli, C.D. (2012). Intercultural misunderstanding in South Africa: an analysis of non-verbal communication behaviour in context. *Intercultural Communication Studies* XXI (2).

Questionapro, (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.questionpro.com/a/TakeSurvey?id=3637064>.

Shankule, K. and Woldemariam, H.Z. (2015). An evaluation of the pragmatic competence of high school students of English: a case study in Ethiopia. *NAWA journal of language and communication*, 9 (2) 40-63.

Sottitat, C. (2017). Cross Cultural Nonverbal Communication. <http://faculty.tru.ca/jhu/Cross%20Cultural%20Nonverbal%20Communication.pdf>.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2012). What is culture? a compilation of quotations: global PAD core concepts. [https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad/openhouse/interculturalskills/global\\_pad\\_-\\_what\\_is\\_culture.pdf](https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad/openhouse/interculturalskills/global_pad_-_what_is_culture.pdf).

Teddle, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: a typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1 (1).

Tesema, S. A. and Woldemariam, H.Z. (2016). An evaluation of the specific English language needs of students of engineering: a case study. *NAWA journal of language and communication*. 10 (1). 18-46. <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=28195db3-b4b0-4c5b-b499-fd26c99b1277%40sessionmgr4008>.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1996). The influence of cultural individualism-collectivism, self-construal's, and individual values on human communication research. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249471865\\_The\\_Influence\\_of\\_Cultural\\_IndividualismCollectivism\\_Self\\_Construals\\_and\\_Individual\\_Values\\_on\\_Communication\\_Styles\\_Across\\_Cultures](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249471865_The_Influence_of_Cultural_IndividualismCollectivism_Self_Construals_and_Individual_Values_on_Communication_Styles_Across_Cultures).

Wang, Y., & Gu, P., (2005). *Reducing intercultural communication barriers between seafarers with different cultural backgrounds*. Foreign Languages College, Dalian Maritime University, China. <https://trid.trb.org/view/776109>.

Wang, Y.J., & Lê, T. (2006). *Teaching, learning and management: a case study of intercultural communication and education*.

Woldemariam, H.Z. (2018). The enhancement of sociolinguistic competence through feminist stylistics. *Asian journal of African studies, Volume 43, pp 31-80*. DOI: [N0DE07404927](https://doi.org/10.1080/00420747.2018.1484927).

Woldemariam, H.Z. (2015). The development of pragmatic competence (pc) through pragmatic stylistics (PS). *NAWA journal of language and communication* 9 (1) 46-88. DOI: [1G1-435095410/3](https://doi.org/10.1080/10759463.2015.1084103).