

Effectiveness of Intercultural Communication of Pakistani Students during Foreign Study Programs

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: In today's global world media is not the only forum for cross-cultural communication. Student exchange programs also provide students ample opportunities to interact with diversified, multi-cultural and multi-lingual communities. As international students exchange programme is one of the platforms that provides students to experience others' culture and discover their own intercultural communication effectiveness.

Methodology: The present mixed method study uses the basic conceptual framework of anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) training. To focus on four aspects of AUM; self-concept, reaction to others, group interactions and mindfulness to measure the intercultural communication effectiveness of Pakistani students going overseas in exchange programs. The research participants include undergraduates from a private sector business university in Karachi.

Findings/Conclusion: The results indicated that exchange program students' intercultural communication effectiveness was above average. The research suggested that there is a need of more studies like this which include not only the participants but also the people with whom the learners communicate.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication Effectiveness, Cross-Cultural Communication, Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM).

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Introduction

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines International students as students who go to countries other than their own for study purposes. The research states that around 10,000 visas are issued in Pakistan for acquiring education in other countries (Samad, 2014). Each year, many Pakistani students are traveling abroad for study and these students prefer countries like Australia, North America, China, and other European countries for their higher education (Umrani *et al.*, 2017). Highlighting the increasing interest of the college and university students in studying abroad, Ledeman (2017) recommends, finding out the influence and efficacy of programs like student exchange. Besides this importance, Berg (2007) mentioned that although pupils from student exchange programs become able to get higher grades, these grades do not help them to enhance their intercultural effectiveness.

People all around the world belong to different regions and these regions have a specific culture that creates boundaries, and Language is a representation of these cultures (Hall, 2008). Thus, the difference of languages creates obstacles in the communication of people from cross-culture (Edgell & Haenisch, 1995; Cohen, 2004). Cultures also mould perception that is why, people from different cultures possess different views regarding world. Differences of perceptions from person to person may lead to the marked distinction of people's communication and behaviour (Abukhalaf & von Meding, 2021). Communication between people from the same culture is quite different than people from cross-culture. According to Samovar and Porter (1997), the study of the communication of people, mainly being affected by their different cultural background, is called intercultural communication. Samovar and Porter (1997) also presented a model for intercultural communication that explains encoding and decoding of a message in cross languages. A message differs in comprehension because of the interpreter's different cultural background. For the worst, the meaning of a message may completely change in translation (Florin, 2018). This issue does not only occur in intercultural communication but also in same cultural communication when a foreign language is introduced as an official language. For instance, in the Pakistani context, government schools student may have to face difficulties in English medium courses (Umrani & Bughio, 2017). Even people may feel difficulty in communication when they realize their first languages are not the same and they do not have perfect command of each other's' languages. In such cases, misunderstandings may occur while communicating. As perceptions may also vary due to multiple factors like upbringing and life experiences, people from a common language may have different understandings of the same word (Irwin, 2020). That is the reason; it may not be guaranteed that there will be no misunderstandings when people of common first languages are communicating.

Since messages are not only conveyed through words but through nonverbal gestures too. Other than language, another obstacle of cross-cultural communication is nonverbal gestures like, eye contact, body movement, and proximity. Nonverbal messages also include attire, quietness, and spatial arrangement (Abduazizova, 2021). Such nonverbal can mostly be misunderstood because of habitual use of gestures, postures, eye contact, and facial & kinaesthetic movement during cross-cultural communication. For instance, in eastern culture, eye contact of opposite gender is not much appreciated while it may seem rude in western culture if eye contact is not maintained regardless of gender (Purnell, 2018).

The study focuses on the four components i.e. group interaction, self-concept, mindfulness, and their reaction to strangers that can help an individual to improve his/her intercultural effectiveness.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

Question. No. 1: Are intercultural foreign study exchange programs effective?

Question. No. 2: What are the effects of the intercultural foreign study exchange program on Pakistani learners?

Review of the Related Literature

Exchange Students

Maharaja (2018) found a positive change in the behavior and attitude of the students who study abroad. Berg (2012) believes that this is the result of colleges and universities publicizing exchange programs for global experience. In one of his research, Papadopoulos (2003) stated that those exchange students are comparatively broad minded, creative and patient towards practice nursing due to intercultural effectiveness. Likewise, from a students' opinion it is cleared that living in abroad helps them to better understanding verbal as well as nonverbal communication even in cross-culture. This attitude helps them read their patients' nonverbal communication when words cannot be spoken because of language barriers (Lee and Negrelli, 2018). Although being in foreign land cause difficulties in adapting socially contrasted cultural values and educational system (Irimias, et al. 2019). When students are accompanied by different cultures' people they become endurable towards their perceptions and culture. For intercultural

effectiveness, people go through different stages from cultural awareness to cultural competence. As claimed by Papadopoulos (2003), exchanged students have moved from first stage to cultural sensitivity. This claim shows that with little effort they can make up to the last stage of cultural competence.

Intercultural Communication Effectiveness

Intercultural communication effectiveness is defined by Byram (1997) as having insight of one's self others; practicing skills to relate, interpret, discover and interact; and paying respect to others' ideologies. Moreover, Lambert (1994) explained this term by dividing it into 5 components i-e: Cultural understanding, non-native language's proficiency, practice of profession in foreign land, world knowledge and endurance of social diversity. Deardoff (2004) believes that above mentioned definition is well defined. Thus, concluding all these definitions American Academy of Family Physicians (2008) discovered the intercultural communication effectiveness is due to the assistance of self-concept and cultural diversity.

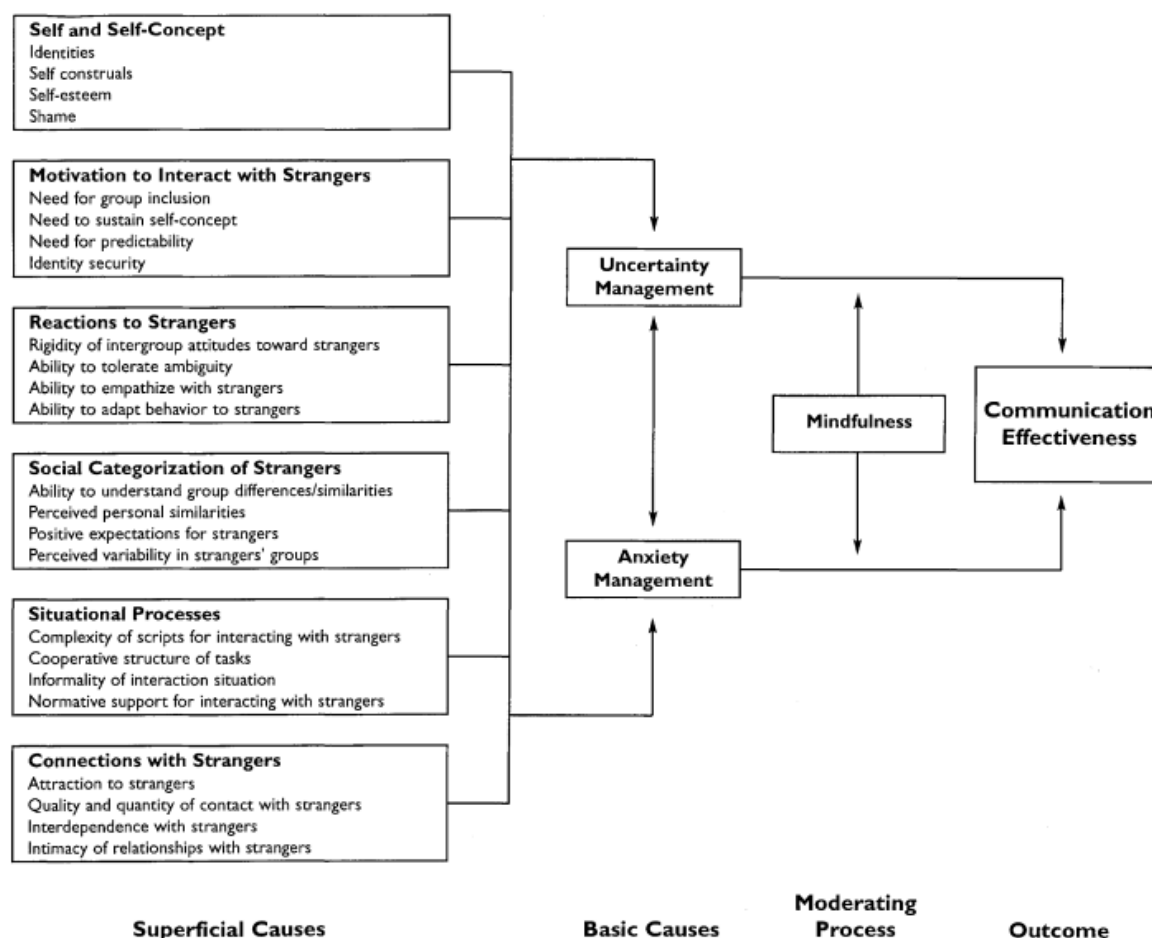


Fig. 1. An illustration of the basic AUM theory.

Self-Concept

Self-concept is a paradigm for a person that helps him develop and grow himself (Bandura, 1997; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Every person has diverse self-concepts due to different life experiences and contexts which build their personalities uniquely. These unique personalities cause them to perceive world differently (Raban 2020). These developments mainly occur in school life. What students experience in their early age shapes their beliefs that is the reason researchers tried to highlight the importance of self-concept from pupils' point of view. This is the domain for social psychologists to study interpretations of

people's perceptions. In a study, Bong and Skaalvik (2003) stated that degree of enthusiastic, communal and cognitive commitments vary in students from diverse self-beliefs in their educational institutes.

In other words, Self-concept is a versatile and cognitive framework that builds someone's belief and assesses its relationship with the surroundings. It is actually a key segment of personalities. Comparative to previous studies that asserted undergraduates' have positive self-concept, a study was conducted by Zhang (2010) for the exploration of level of undergraduates' self-concepts the findings of the said research revealed that their self-concept is between the intermediate and higher ranking. While Costa and McCrae (1994) declares that the personality of a grown up is fully stable.

What is more, the stability of grown up shows the calmness of students from higher educational institutes. That is may be because at this age, their self-concept has been fully developed and they can adapt the changes in surroundings and the feelings aroused by these changes. Even though, this age has stabilized self-concept but the changes in virtuosity, individualism and family distinctiveness can be seen. After giving moral-ethical education to university students, it is noticed that some students who had high self-esteem were highly satisfied with their family background but some who had lower self-esteem were unhappy with their capability and performance (Mateer, Taff et al. 2021).

Base of self-concept can be affected with the realization of social distinction. Marsh (1986) adds that origin of a person is also a factor affecting self-concept in academic point of view. It is believed that factors that alter aspects of self-concept are attributed to People's success and disappointments. The relationship between these attribution and self-concept is reciprocal. It means that previous failures or success affect aspects of self-concept and the consequential self-concept directs the attribution later on (Dash 2021).

Reaction to Strangers

As Chapdelaine and Alexitch, (2004); Winkelman, (1994) pointed out that most of the students face cultural shock when engaging in new environment, the reason for this cultural shock is cognitive fatigue, stress reactions, personal shock and role shock. Cognitive fatigue is because of information glut and stress reaction is a mental state in new surroundings (Misra, et al. 2020). Furthermore, personal shock is a name of sentiments where one cannot find confidential relations. Lastly, role shock is a feeling of entirely change of role a person used to be. Although institutes help to alleviate impact of cultural shock, Chapdelaine and Alexitch, (2004); Winkelman, (2004) perceive students may encounter some of its effect toward the start of their residence. So they think such events should be organized where students can interact with native community because residual impacts can be further diminished by having friendly association with native people.

Dealing with strangers gives access to information about them and helps students to take on adaptable and compassionate conduct for them (Williamson 2020). In this study, rather than naming response to outsiders, categorization of outsiders or associations with strangers, the things that are identified as collaboration with strangers are all merged under the name "reaction to strangers".

Group Interaction

While studying enculturation process, exchange students while studying in foreign land face trouble due to cultural difference and social diversity; they have no choice to get away from these experiences. These experiences affect their physical, mental, social and relational qualities (Berry, et al. 1987). Studying in American universities may be an exciting experience and acculturation but, as per the study conducted by Erichsen & Bolliger, (2011) and Bradley, (2000), students studying in American universities students encounter so many hurdles and challenges in adapting to the environment. These challenges are not only related to language difference and academic system but also related to social problems like, loneliness, feeling of segregation, anxiety, monetary stress and feeling of uncertainty.

From the reports of international students, it is observed that feeling of isolation is frequently reported as a challenge to face (Arkoudis, et al. 2019). Although their interactions occur with native people or cross-

culture it is mostly concluded as negative. Students also complained that they feel discriminated and being unfairly treated among other students during class exercises, curricular activities, and group work.

Mindfulness

Langer first coined the term mindfulness, later on, it was further modified by Gudykunst (1995) in theory of Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM). By further analyzing the data, one can acquire knowledge of the communication effectiveness of female supervisors. This analysis indicates that stereotypical personalities are often linked with females that cause them to face multiple challenges in their way to success. Eagly and Carli (2007) assert that, stereotypically, communal characteristics are affiliated with male and agentic characteristics with the male. As per Eagly and Karau (2002), favouritism in assessments makes the role compatible among ladies and the apparent requirements of leadership. In research, Oshagbemi and Gill (2003) tracked down that in regards to leadership both genders were comparative. The Statistical mean score of Communication Effectiveness for male administrators is 4.08 while as for female administrators it is 4.09.

Methodology

According to the intercultural scholars, the best way to assess intercultural competence is through a mix method approach that includes qualitative and quantitative measures. For this study, the researchers adapted the survey questionnaire developed by Mukherji and Jian (2015) followed by quantitative descriptive analysis. The study was conducted during the academic year 2018-2019.

Participants

For this purpose, a private sector university was selected which has maximum students participating in Foreign exchange programs. Approximately 30 students each year participate in a short term student exchange program study in different countries from this Business University located in Karachi, Pakistan. Research subjects included university students who have been to university abroad on students exchange program. The study was open to all those students who have a foreign exposure and the participation in the study was voluntary. All these students were part of a Facebook group as informed by the HR department of the university.

Data Collection

Data was collected using online survey forms through social media platform (Facebook group). This group had more than 10000 members including the current and alumni students and faculty members of the selected organization of the participants. The survey form comprised of four sections dealing with indicators of communication effectiveness. The first section dealt with demographics of the respondents. The data was collected via Google forms and the data was analysed using SPSS 22.0 version.

Instrument

Anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory (Gudykunst, 1993, 1995, 1998a) is designed to explain effective interpersonal and intergroup communication. One of the major axioms of AUM theory is that anxiety/uncertainty management directly influences the effectiveness of communication in interpersonal and intergroup encounters. That is, individuals can communicate effectively to the extent that they are able to manage their anxiety and accurately predict and explain others' attitudes, feelings, and behaviours.

Self-Concept

1. Before travelling as an exchange student, I was worried about making a good impression
2. Before travelling as an exchange student, I learnt some words and phrases to communicate better
3. Before travelling as an exchange student, I was anxious about not knowing the language
4. Before travelling as an exchange student, I gathered information about the country i.e., language, culture

5. Before travelling as an exchange student, I was not worried about being in an unknown environment
6. Before travelling as an exchange student, I was not nervous about-facing questions from the foreign students
7. I tried to understand their gestures when interacting with people from other cultures
8. Before travelling as an exchange student, I got information from people who lived there

Reaction to Strangers

1. I felt threatened in a new situation when interacting with strangers
2. If a foreign student did not understand me, I explained things differently
3. While interacting with students from different countries, I tried to know about their background
4. During the exchange program, I preferred to live amongst people of my own culture
5. I did not judge them on the basis of my own values when interacting with people from other cultures
6. During the exchange program, I liked to socialize with Pakistanis after study hours
7. While negotiating with foreign students, I paid attention to their expressions, gestures and postures
8. When I interacted with multicultural groups, I asserted my authority to control outcomes
9. When I spoke with foreigners, I sometimes changed my accent
10. If I invited foreign friends for dinner, I tried to find out their food preferences

Group Interaction

1. I felt sure of myself when interacting with people from other cultures
2. If I spotted any discomfort while explaining a point of discussion to a student from a different culture, I explained things differently
3. During meetings in a multicultural group, I welcomed suggestions
4. If my multicultural team had to meet a project deadline, I used to discuss the process very thoroughly
5. If my multicultural team members did not agree with my point of view, I was willing to accept changes
6. When discussing something in a study group, I used to do my best to convince the other members to accept my views
7. If members in my multicultural study group did not participate during meetings, I patiently encourage them to give their views
8. In a multicultural group, I found it easier to trust the judgment of people from my own culture.
9. When I interacted with multicultural groups I changed my ideas in order to resolve conflicts

Mindfulness

1. While studying with foreigners, I asked questions to get their perspective
2. In my multicultural team, if someone did not respond as expected, I talked to the person to understand the reason
3. While studying with people from other cultures, I used to be cautious about my nonverbal expressions

Drawing on the AUM theory, the scale was adapted to measure communication effectiveness against four dimensions; self-concept, reaction to strangers, group interaction and mindfulness. The coefficient alphas for the four factors were as follows:

Table 1: *Reliability of the key concept*

Sr. No	Factor	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Self-Concept	.988
2	Reaction to Strangers	.986
3	Group Interaction	.986
4	Mindfulness	.906

The following is the item details of the survey questionnaire. Each item was followed by a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) which the respondents rated.

Results and Discussion

This sections deals with the data analysis. SPSS 22.0 was used to analyse the data. The data was collected in the academic year 2018-2019.

Demographic Details

Table 2 shows the total number of participants that were 47 out of which 26 were female and 21 were male.

Table2: *Respondents' Gender*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	21	44.7	44.7	44.7
	Female	26	55.3	55.3	100.0
	Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows that about a third fourth of the participants (72.3%) were from age range of 20 to 25 years and 22% were ranged between 15 to 20 years.

Table 3: *Age of the respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15-20	10	21.3	21.3	21.3
	20-25	34	72.3	72.3	93.6
	25-30	1	2.1	2.1	95.7
	More than 35	2	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Country of visit as an Exchange student

Figure 2 shows that Turkey was the most frequently visited country by the students. Overall 15 different countries were visited by exchange program students.

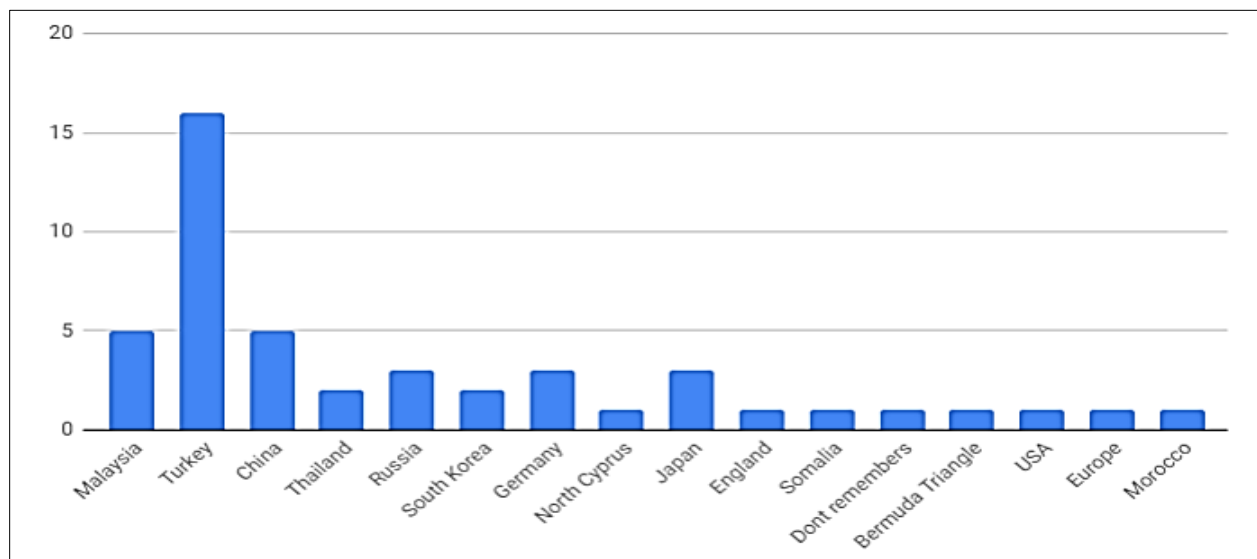


Figure 2: *Countries visited by exchange program students*

Descriptive Analysis

Mean average demonstrate that exchange program students had average score of self-concept, only item 4 which was about being inquisitive about language and culture of the target place and item 7 with higher

mean suggest that students think that they could better read the non-verbals of the people they were interacting with.

Table 4: *Self-concept Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Concept 1	47	1	5	3.62	1.054
Self Concept 2	47	1	5	3.38	1.278
Self Concept 3	47	1	5	3.49	1.283
Self Concept 4	47	2	5	4.09	.880
Self Concept 5	47	1	5	3.38	1.278
Self Concept 6	47	1	5	3.34	1.290
Self Concept 7	47	1	5	4.00	1.000
Self Concept 8	47	2	5	3.87	1.013
Valid N (listwise)	47				

With regard to reaction to strangers, item number 10 and 13 demonstrate higher mean. That means students agreed that they could use alternate ways when they had problem understanding in one way and they would like to spend time with people who come from their country. Rest of the items' effectiveness of intercultural communication was relatively low.

Table 5: *Reaction to strangers Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reaction to Strangers 9	47	1	5	2.19	1.056
Reaction to Strangers 10	47	1	5	4.00	.885
Reaction to Strangers 11	47	1	5	3.81	1.076
Reaction to Strangers 12	47	1	5	2.77	1.202
Reaction to Strangers 13	47	1	5	4.34	.841
Reaction to Strangers 14	47	1	5	3.06	1.223
Reaction to Strangers 15	47	1	5	3.81	1.096
Reaction to Strangers 16	47	1	5	3.34	.867
Reaction to Strangers 17	47	1	5	2.62	1.095
Reaction to Strangers 18	47	1	5	3.45	1.119
Valid N (listwise)	47				

Table 6 describes group interaction effectiveness among Pakistani students during exchange program. Mean results shows that students had average score in this section. However, lower mean of item 26 suggest that students show reluctance on fellow members of the group belonging from the native country.

Table 6: *Group Interaction Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Group Interaction 19	47	1	5	3.94	.895
Group Interaction 20	47	1	5	3.77	1.068
Group Interaction 21	47	1	5	4.23	.840
Group Interaction 22	47	1	5	4.11	.840
Group Interaction 23	47	1	5	3.87	.969
Group Interaction 24	47	1	5	3.70	.954
Group Interaction 25	47	2	5	3.83	.732
Group Interaction 26	47	1	5	2.98	1.032
Group Interaction 27	47	1	5	3.36	1.009
Valid N (listwise)	47				

With reference to mindfulness aspect of intercultural communication, students mean score was above average, which means Pakistani students were mindful about their intercultural communication skills.

Table 7: *Mindfulness Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mindfulness 28	47	1	5	4.13	.769
Mindfulness 29	47	1	5	3.51	.930
Mindfulness 30	47	1.0	5.0	3.447	1.0386
Valid N (listwise)	47				

A good percentage (70%) of the students could anticipate the intercultural communication challenges so they were worried about leaving a good impression of their self-concept. Half of the students did not bother much about their language skills which means they felt confident to use language; however, the rest of the half put some efforts to learn target language. However, about 80% students gathered information related to cultural aspect of the country they were visiting to, and for that they also contacted the people who were living there. Students reported that overall they were confident and prepared to interact in a new culture. Students also claimed that they were not threatened to encounter strangers from a different culture. In case of having any issues related to intercultural communication, they relied on non-verbal, tried to understand other's cultural values as they preferred spending more time with foreigners instead of looking for people from the home country. As reported, by large (93%) Pakistani students' treated others without any biases. Pakistani students also reported that their behaviour was very gentle and participative. Suggestions were welcomed and analysed non-verbal communication as well.

This study offers some valuable contribution by adding to the existing body of literature which focuses on the intercultural communication among foreign students.

Conclusions and Implications

This mix method approach research demonstrated that the Pakistani learners endeavored to be attentive in the intercultural situation and unbiased towards the people of other cultures, and they were ready to have expressive interaction with them without any prescribed preparation. The results of the study are found to be aligned with the study conducted by other researchers like: Papadopoulos (2003), Deardoff (2004), Berg (2012), Maharaja (2018), and Lee & Negrelli, (2018). The research showed that the learners acquired highly constructive experience, providing an opportunity to cultivate understanding for different other cultures, and an insight of intercultural mindfulness and proficiency. A stay in other country provides a chance to gain information about the people and the place. Pakistani learners got benefit from the chance to communicate with their international counterparts. They tried to learn the cultural and language of the host country but the exposure was not enough because they were unable to communicate with the local communities. Since acquiring knowledge regarding cross-cultural interaction needs a great deal of attention and struggle therefore the learners' information was limited. The participants also reported that their fear of intercultural communication was died down once they were engaged in meaningful conversation with the international students. Due to this, their deep rooted perception regarding facing other culture was altered to some extent, providing them an opportunity to inculcate cultural harmony.

The present study implies that this intercultural exchange program as a chance for expressive communications with national and international students provides significant potential to enrich learners' cross-cultural knowledge, getting them ready for diversity, adaptation, and adjustment. Even though this is subjected to numerous aspects, all of them are not easy to guess. The results of the study present the suitability of the intercultural exchange program for learners' cross-cultural development. Therefore, it is implied that students should be sent to study in a foreign university for at least one semester. As a result, learners would be experiencing life style and culture of the other countries. This will ultimately help in the growth of intercultural communication of the students.

This study presented the effectiveness of intercultural communication from the learners' perspective based on their experience. Similar type of study can be conducted to gather more information involving not only the learners but also the individuals with whom they were engaged in meaningful interaction. The present research was limited to the Pakistani learners, another future study is suggested to explore the foreign students' point of view who study in Pakistan during intercultural exchange program.

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Conflict of Interest


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