Cross-cultural Facets in Business Communication: Corporate Realities and Current Classroom Teaching Trends

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Abstract

In today's global trend, culture has turned out to be one of the most pivotal aspects in business interactions across countries and continents. Cultural diversities affect—more clearly, dominate—business dealings. Today's business executives and corporate employees need to have the appropriate communicative skills in terms of cross-cultural dimensions. Business Communication, being a premier course in the Bachelors and Masters level of Business studies, is considered to be the most effective platform to train the business students in this cross-cultural issue of business relations. Apart from dealing with business letters, interoffice correspondence, report writing and organizational affairs, Business Communication is supposed to provide all necessary inputs regarding cross-cultural features that would enable the students to cope with the present realities of the corporate world—both nationally and internationally. But, the pertinent queries are: To what extent is cross-cultural communication being taken care of in the teaching-learning of Business Communication? In other words, how far are our students of different business schools being equipped to meet the challenges of communicative complexities that result from cultural diversities around the world? How far are innovation and idea generation encouraged in the Business Communication classrooms? How interesting and inventive is the teaching method to the students? Is the syllabus of this course being updated and modernized keeping in pace with the changing corporate culture of our country, as well as of our neighboring nations with whom we are in the process of opening new business frontiers? Our study has aimed at discovering these realities of classroom situation in Business Communication with regard to the gradual changes in the present corporate culture.

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1.0   PRELUDE

Most of us will probably remember how, while in school, we were being taught to write different types of applications—say, to the principal of the school or to the editor of a newspaper—by beginning the opening paragraph with 'I beg most respectfully to state...', 'I humbly beg to state...' or 'With due honor and humble submission I would state...' and by concluding the final paragraph always 'fervently praying' and 'hoping' that our requests will be granted and invariably ending with phrases like 'your most obedient pupil...' or 'yours respectfully...'.

It must have been quite confusing to many students as to why they should have to grovel hat in hand so to speak even the most routine of requests, why one should have to 'beg' even for something as mundane as a simple leave of absence. And to be honest, a majority of them had no courage to ask their teachers for any clarification as such an act would only meet with the sternest of glares, if not actual physical punishment, for trying to be 'too smart'! To ask how one could possibly beg 'disrespectfully' or how a student knew that s/he was the 'most obedient pupil' was unthinkable.

Though as teachers we recognize how these typical structures of language have been the holdover from the British colonial system, we find the same things still being taught at the secondary and the higher secondary levels in our country. As if, we are caught in a deadly time-warp from where there seems to be no escape. Regardless of city-mafassal-rural school/college backgrounds, most of our first and second semester students in the graduation level whirl round these stereotypes of language use. And very interestingly, when we ask them to come out of these stereotypes, many of them find it hard to absorb instantly.

Even in our day-to-day activities, we are accustomed to stereotyped behavioral patterns derived from our colonial past. To mention a few—reverently jumping up from the seat every time at the sight of the boss, humbly uttering 'sir...sir' or 'yes sir' at every encounter, making all possible effort to please the boss and, without any logical reason, remain standing while brushing aside important work as long as he or she stays in the employees' rooms.

In terms of our personal exposure to the teaching of Business Communication, we have well comprehended the fact that this master-servant notion is very much alive in our present business culture and correspondence. The fact that it may have been acceptable in the past, even the norm, to submit a cover letter 'begging to state' that one is applying for a certain position, it is nowadays seen as a lack of confidence—a mistake that is certain to cost one the job.

This transition of outlook—from the colonial concept of exaggerated humility to self-esteemed forthrightness—in correspondence, particularly business correspondence, is an inevitable result of brisk technological changes over the years. Communication has become a matter of 'speedy and free-flowing exchange of information', and thus work drive of people has developed immensely. Organizations hardly wait for postal or hand-to-hand letters for initiating and approving ventures—of course, officially they do—all activities are primarily being conducted over telephonic and cyber communication.

What is very interesting in this regard is, nowadays people send an identical missive by e-mail to people they know intimately, but copy it to people they have never met; and all of them feel free to copy it to other people, possibly friends, possibly competitors (Carey, 2002). Certainly the way people communicate now is leading to more wide contacts.

In today's fast paced world our business students cannot afford to be hindered by invisible ties to any particular business culture. They must be free to explore and understand the myriad different cultures and styles, and how they influence modern business practices.

As the business world becomes more and more globalized—with boundaries shifting constantly and new frontiers opening up almost overnight, businesses and entrepreneurs all over the world have come to recognize the undeniable importance of cross-cultural communication. As regards our country, this is categorically significant as we are now in the process of initiating numerous joint ventures with our neighboring nations, as well as exploring all possible avenues of trade and commerce with them.

Now the question is: how do we select, and thereby prepare, a suitable and efficient workforce who would be prepared to face the challenges of

this multicultural global business scenario? The answer is simple. We need to examine and learn what other developed nations have been doing in this regard. The issue of, cross-cultural communication is offered as a credit course in most of the business communication and international business degree programs in universities through the world. Intensive training on cross-cultural features is provided on a regular basis in their respective corporate sectors to create competent business managers. It is such a key factor that general and specific country-based training programs are even on the internet.

Yet in Bangladesh, there has been very little—in fact hardly any—attempt to deal with cross-cultural issues in communication studies at the university level.

2.0   LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

We need to focus first on the culture issue in order to understand its inextricable relationship with human language and communication styles. Culture has been defined by social scientists as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the member of one human group from another. Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values; and values are among the building blocks of culture.

According to Samovar and Porter (1994), culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

However, a more clear explanation of culture has been given by Holland and Quinn where they defined culture as shared knowledge, i.e. what people 'must know in order to act as they do, make the things they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do' (1987). Here, the terms 'act as they do' refers to our behavior in general—including verbal behavior, 'make the things they make' refers to artifacts and 'interpret their experience' refers to the structure of our knowledge. No doubt, the first and the last aspects are crucial in dealing with our issue. In our society we behave differently regarding the experience that we encounter, and the structure of our knowledge allows us to

communicate with others accordingly. The notions of appropriateness that regulate our linguistic (i.e. communicative) behavior are derived from the grammar of culture (D'souza, 1988). Our cultural expressions are evident in our cognitive structures, as well as in the norms of our behavior that we utilize when we use any language. Therefore, the role of language in shaping, storage, retrieval and communication of knowledge and information is obvious.

Now, when we talk about this role of language, we mainly refer to the *style* of using our language in each and every domain of our societal existence. This style depends on a wide variety of features—such as, self-esteem and sense of identity; personal belief, outlook toward surroundings; interpersonal relationship with family members, friends, and well-wishers etc. We use particular styles in our verbal and written communication according to all the above factors. Thus, our styles are the representations of our *communicative self*. Sociolinguists have put it vividly by saying that our styles are indicative of our attitude toward the information that we convey in different circumstances (Biber and Finnegan, 1988). Our *communicative self* allows us to use our styles in terms of certain markers—like, reliability of knowledge and modes of knowing (i.e. belief, induction, hearsay and deduction).

We can have some examples in this regard. Expressions such as *certainly, definitely, surely* are styles of more reliable information in communication, whereas *normally, generally, primarily* are styles of statistical reliability. *Must* (in sentences like *He must be here*) signals induction with a certainty on the part of the speaker/writer. *See, hear, feel* etc. (in sentences like *I see that you are very tired*) convey the sensory basis of our induction, whereas *supposed to be, apparently* signal hearsay evidence (Kachru, 1996). Apart from this, there are other forms of the *style* that signal a high involvement of the communicators with their topics—like, use of first person pronoun, choice of nouns and verbs with emotive content, exclamatory sentences, expression of personal hopes and wishes. All these provide the speaker's/writer's attitudes. Style in this sense, can be defined as the configuration of the entire range of linguistic features that indicates (a) manners of expression, (b) the speaker's/writer's attitudes/beliefs toward the content and source of information conveyed, and (c) the presumption of relevance to the receiver(s) of that information (ibid).

Coming back to the issue of culture, human communication styles vary significantly according to cultural contexts of different areas and countries. In case of a country having multilingual set up (like India and Pakistan), cultural diversities are immense. Even in country with monolingual set up, cultural gaps—specially pertaining to social norms—can be wide as well. In Bangladesh, we do find variations in social customs among districts. As humans, we shape, formulize and nourish our personal values, beliefs, outlook and attitude in terms of the cultural environment we have been subjected to—and subsequently, apply our judgments in all sorts of communication strategies. Therefore, even if we all use a uniform language for communication—say, English—our styles are bound to differ, simply because our *communicative selves* (that we have *referred* earlier) differ from one another. It is for this very basic reason that English, despite that fact that it is the de facto global language, has taken such diversified profiles throughout the English-using world. And it is for this further reason that cross-cultural communication through this global language has gained such prime importance in international trade and commercial transactions.

3.0 CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES

The very interesting thing about language (mother tongue) is, it is learned unconsciously and is often taken for granted. That our mother tongues are amalgamation of so many features like **verbal code** (a set of rules about the use of words in the creation of spoken and written messages), **phonology** (rules for combining phonemes, i.e. the basic units of sounds), **morphology** (rules for combining phonemes to form morphemes i.e. the smallest units of meanings), **semantics** (the study of meaning of words), **syntactics** (the study of relationship of words) and **pragmatics** (how language is used and how it affects human perceptions and behaviors) is hardly kept in our minds.

Language influences, or even determines, the ways people think or view the world. There are two views to this as mentioned in the famous Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis in linguistics. The 'firmer' view holds that language functions like a prison; once people learn it, they are irreversibly affected by it. The 'softer' view holds that language shapes how people think and experience their world; but this influence is not permanent.

Whatever may be the case, there is no denying that language differences
affect intercultural communication. Language is used to identify people
in a group, either by members in a group or by outsiders of the group;
and due to this fact, learning a second language is also learning the
culture associated with that language—which is of course, a matter of art
and prolonged practice.

3.1 Cultural attitudes toward verbal messages

Cultures differ in the importance that we place on words and speech. In
the U.S., speech is considered as an object of inquiry. Its primary
function is to express one's ideas and thoughts as clearly, logically and
persuasively as possible. On the other hand – 'Those who know do not
talk. Those who talk do not know (Lao Tsu)' – this popular Chinese
saying illustrates the Chinese attitude towards speech.

The Asian attitude toward speech and rhetoric tends to be holistic—the
words are only part of the total communication context which includes
the interpersonal relationships among people. Words are considered as
useful tools of human expression only to the extent that the user
recognizes their limitations.

3.2 Forms of verbal expression

Verbal expressions in low-context cultures are direct, explicit and exact.
Silence is seen as negative and is thus avoided. But people in high-
context cultures tend to avoid negative or confrontational verbal
messages. Courtesy often takes precedence over truthfulness with
cultural emphasis on the maintenance of social harmony. The Japanese
may say 'hai' (yes) without implying agreement. Often it means, 'I
understand what you are saying.' Asians can ever be suspicious of the
authenticity of direct verbal expressions of love and respect. Excessive
verbal praise sometimes is received with feelings of embarrassment.

3.3 Nonverbal communication

In any sort of communication—be it personal, social, official—people do
not exclusively use verbal messages. Rather study has shown we mostly
use non-verbal communication in our day-to-day activities. It is
categorically true in case of business interactions. Wordless expressions

can be more powerful than verbal expressions in conveying messages. The different types of non-verbal communication are:

a. General appearance and dress: We make judgments about people based on how attractive we think they are. But standards and judgments regarding attractiveness are subject to cultural variations. Clothing and skin color can also influence how we perceive and communicate with others.

b. Physical gestures: All cultures have some systems for understanding the meaning of movements and expressions of the body. The meanings conveyed through physical gestures are different in different cultures. The movements of one's head to depict 'yes' and 'no' are interestingly reversed in various cultures.

c. Facial expressions: People are more likely to interpret facial expressions accurately if they interpret them within the entire communication context. Although facial expressions can be very individualistic and may not convey cultural meanings, the display and intensity of emotion is very much culturally based. Some facial expressions are thought to be universal, like smiling (meaning 'joy' or 'happiness').

d. Eye contact and gaze: Our interpersonal relationships are affected by how we use our eyes. Culture modifies how much eye contact we may engage in, and with whom. For example it is common for an American woman to make eye contact with a man, however in Nigeria it would be scandalous for a woman to be so 'forward'.

e. Touch: The meaning inferred from touch is influenced by such factors as the mood or state we are in, relationship with the toucher, past history, duration of the touch, location of the touch, whether the touch is active or passive etc. The duration, frequency and location of the touch are largely culture-based. While it may be quite common to see people of same sexes walking hand in hand, or with their arms around each other countries like India, Bangladesh and china, in Europe or North America it could be construed as a sign of homosexuality. In Senegal it is important for men not to touch women whom they are introduced to; Muslim women typically will not extend a hand to a man.

f. Smell: Culture perceives odors differently and assign them different meaning and importance during interaction.

g. Paralanguage: How things are heard and vocalized varies and holds different meanings in different cultures. There are three categories of vocalizations—vocal characterizers (laughing, crying, yelling, yawning etc.), vocal qualifiers (volume, pitch, rhythm), and vocal segregates (uh-huh, shh, oooh, mmmh etc.).

h. Space and distance: Space and distance are also of special significance in different cultures. North Americans are very protective of what they term their 'personal space', which in terms of personal inter-action may mean an arms length of distance between each other or refer to their personal affairs. In other cultures closeness (hugging, touching and kissing) may be quite acceptable, even if the personal relationship is not of an intimate nature.

i. Time: The concept of time varies from culture to culture. In polychronic countries like the USA and Canada (where different time zones officially exist in different areas) careful adjustments of schedules have to be made in case of foreign business interactions—which is not the case in monochronic countries (where a single time zone officially exist in all areas). Apart from this, the notion of punctuality differs country to country. American businessmen, who tend to maintain strict schedules in formal settings, find it hard to cope with their counterparts of Mexico or Arab countries who are comparatively much more flexible in this regard.

j. Silence: In Japan, what isn't said and done can be as important as what actually is. Politeness precedes efficiency. Harmony precedes details. The Japanese will rarely say 'no' or directly confront, deny, challenge or disrespect anything that is said. This does not mean they don't disagree; it means they are indicating disagreement softly and indirectly. Phrases like 'this needs further study', 'these things can be difficult', 'perhaps we can look at this in a different way', all indicate a definite problem. If things really are difficult, one might simply get silence. If pressed too hard, the Japanese might indicate this by sucking air deeply through their teeth and remaining silent. This is definitely a bad sign.

4.0 BUSINESS ACROSS CULTURES

Culture is communication; communication is culture (Hall, 2002). Regardless of our workplaces, the growing importance of global business

has made it essential to develop skills in interacting and dealing with people from other countries. Business experts have maintained that philosophically, the best approach is to recognize and value the differences that distinguish the people of other countries (Binkert et al, 1993).

One of the greatest mistakes is to assume that 'people are the same all over' (ibid). People across cultures differ in their religions and values, their ideas and status, their decision-making habits, their attitude toward time, their use of space, their body language and manners etc. These differences invariably lead to misunderstandings in international business relationship—specifically if language differences are there as well.
For example, US women executives find it real hard to deal with business from countries where women seldom play any prominent role in business. European businessmen, while negotiating with Japanese businessmen, find their 'silence' quite confusing to apprehend. French employees hardly take the openness of their American bosses easily. Western executives are often frustrated by the carefree attitude of their Arab counterparts when it comes to punctuality and formal etiquettes. Australian businessmen can be seriously offended by the American businessmen's particular physical gesture of goodwill.

We come to know of 'high-context' and 'low-context' cultures, as propounded uniquely by Edward Hall, where we see how cultural contexts differ, and eventually, how business relations have to be adjusted accordingly. High-context cultures feature (a) much covert and implicit message, (b) internalized messages, (c) much non-verbal coding, (d) reserved reactions, (e) distinct in-groups and out-groups, (f) strong people bonds, (g) high commitment and (h) open and flexible time. On the other hand, low-context cultures feature (a) much overt and explicit message, (b) plainly coded messages, (c) verbalized details, (d) reactions on the surface, (e) flexible in-groups and out-groups, (f) fragile people bonds, (g) low commitment and (h) highly organized time. Apart from this, there are societies with 'individualism' and 'collectivism' (Hofstede, 1980). In the former society, individual autonomy, individual privacy, individual rewards, and competition are prevalent. People are self-oriented, independent, and maintain nuclear families. And in the latter society, we find the existence of group unity and harmony, group belongingness, equal distribution of rewards and cooperation. People there are group-oriented, interdependent, and maintain extended families.

From the above discussions, it is not at all difficult to assume that countries across the globe, as well as societies within the countries, are structured in diverse frames; and thus 'misunderstanding-less communication' is obviously not that an easy task to accomplish.

It has been already projected that business organizations worldwide are bound to face tremendous linguistic-cum-cultural barriers over the next few years, even on home ground, where—with take-overs increasingly happening in Europe—the nationality of the owners and managers may change virtually overnight. This means that more and more workers in Europe, Asia and Africa have to communicate across language and cultural barriers. What is more, it is not only the people at the traditional sharp end of communication, such as export managers or switch-board operators who have to work in a multilingual-multicultural environment. Nowadays, anyone in a company at any level—from technician to designer, or press officer to production worker—can find themselves in communicative situations and may need to use any foreign language, especially English.

Therefore, the best way to prepare oneself to do business with people from other culture is to study their culture in advance—including the minute details. That is, to learn the target culture's history, religion, politics and customs, especially its business customs. Some of the typicalities are: Who makes decisions? How are decisions implemented? How negotiations are usually conducted? Who is to be sent for negotiations? What is the state and activity of bureaucracy? Is gift-giving expected? What is the food menu served during business lunch/dinner? What is the most appropriate attire for business meetings? What are the types of non-verbal communication in business dealings? And most of all, what are the *do*-s and *don't*-s in their business culture?

5.0 CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

5.1 General Techniques

How do international companies come to terms with cultural barriers? What kind of cross-border communication strategies do they employ to ensure that they can act globally by appearing as if local to their customers? There are numerous plans and strategies companies adopt to cope with the cultural problems that arise. Their entire communication strategy is based on ways as to how they would operate in international

markets—whether it will hire local people who speak the language and are familiar with the culture, or use local agents to meet its linguistic-cultural needs; to be precise, their strategy is to find the most cost-effective solution.

The ultimate goal of the companies is to compete against local competition with equal ease and effectiveness however near and far they are trading—be it Singapore, Manila, Dubai, Amsterdam, Lusaka or Nairobi. The companies will make sure that their products and services can match or better the local competition.

Thus, a communication strategy is not just about hiring a language teacher and running a few classes prior to a trade exhibition. From what experts have been saying, we may summarize the following as effective cross-cultural communication strategies:

a. It means not just about setting up language training, but making a language compulsory in the company and making a long-term commitment to a market by running classes for a number of years. It is also about making sure that one has good translations which have been culturally adapted and checked in the country itself.

b. It means carrying out more systematic approaches—such as auditing and evaluating hidden linguistic resources or local cultural knowledge, and making sure one puts the personnel with the right language skills or cultural background in the job.

c. It means making sure the wording on the packaging confirms to local standards, environmental rules and regulations.

d. It means ensuring that the size and color of the packaging meets with local preferences and buying habits (keeping the quality high) ; and thus it means hiring agents for their linguistic and cultural skills.

e. It means sending people to the market who speak the local language well enough to carry out market research by reading newspapers and checking out the local competition by speaking directly to the potential customers in their language.

5.2   Overview of Company Techniques

Here is an overview of some fundamental cross-cultural techniques that
have been in practice since some time in different parts of the world. All
these have been compiled on the basis of a research undertaken in over
450 small and medium sized enterprises to analyze the language skills,
level of competence and cross-cultural training.

According to the survey, some of the major trade secrets of these
companies in terms of cross-cultural communication have been:

a. To communicate in the customer's own language (many companies
support the use of customer's language as a key selling tool).

b. To ensure that all sales literature is translated to the local language
by the company or by a translation agency (some companies develop
local brochures and leaflets in close cooperation with the local
agent/distributor).

c. To double-check the translation with the local partner in order to
check its accuracy.

d. To find a local partner (or local agent) who can negotiate on behalf
of the company.

e. To verify all written communication, i.e. all e-mails, faxes, letters,
manuals, contracts etc. must not leave the company before they have
been checked by an on-site linguist.

f. To impart good English language skills to the employees of sales and
marketing department.

g. To prepare the manuals by a team of engineers (who understand the
content) and linguists (who understand the 'meaning'); engineers
draft the manual while linguists translate and refine the text.

h. To remove the misunderstandings during the translation phase by the
team approach.

i. To cover all expenses of language training.

j. To encourage the employees to attend courses on language and
cultural orientations (a good number of companies organizes
seminars, symposiums, workshops and briefing-sessions on cultural
diversities and ways to handle those).

k. To regard language skills as an essential pre-requisite for selection of
employees.

l. To recruit proficient bilinguals for post, such as management,
purchasing and sales.

m. To study the local language and culture before entering new markets.
n. To adopt innovations in particular cases; like, while communicating with Japanese counterparts, some major Western companies prominently use non-verbal communication styles.
o. To value clients' opinions in the promotion of products.
p. To deal with the target customers even through a third party in case of the absence of in-house expertise in the target language and culture.
q. To employ native speakers and train them up as resource personnel.

6.0   THE CHANGING SCENARIO OF CORPORATE CULTURE

Added to these facts is the crucial aspect of the international business mindset and the corporate culture which have been undergoing steadfast changes since long—and consequently, the changes that started to take place in our corporate sector since some time. These changes positively refer to the changes in overall communication and interaction strategies in the business world. This issue is no less significant as we are aware that the prime target of our business students is to insert themselves into the corporate world as business managers. What are the changes, and how have the changes taken place worldwide? What has been the effect of these changes in our country?

Of course, it needs to be kept in mind that when we talk about the changes in corporate culture, they are interlinked with the cultural proceedings of the respective societies. The corporate sectors are never any isolated identities, and therefore, in order to understand the changes in the corporate culture, one needs to follow and get accustomed to the changes in the greater society. Again, these changes are linked with communication styles.

7.0   BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AS A PREMIER COURSE

In the light of above discussions, it is apparent that all the crucial aspects of cross-cultural communication must be dealt with effectively to prepare the current and the future generations as efficient business executives. In fact these are handled in different courses of Business Studies—like Organizational Behavior, Strategic Management, Finance, Marketing etc. — at the Bachelors and Masters levels.

But, there is a need for a particular course where cross-cultural communication, with all its ramifications, should be handled in a need-based systematic manner. Business Communications has long been a vital course of the BBA program under different business schools due to the prime reason that it mainly concerns the teaching of effective business correspondence through the medium of English. The syllabus of this course in almost all our universities, by and large, deals with issues such as: business letter writing, in-company correspondence (i.e. memorandums, notices, agendas, minutes), report writing, personal communication like, résumé writing, numerous organizational aspects and so on.

However, from the terms 'business' and 'communication', it is obvious that this course is supposed to handle the communicative aspects of business on the whole, and therefore, very logically, communication strategies across cultures come into fore. If one takes a look into the course outline of Business Communication in various international universities, one would find how this issue is being dealt in a well-planned way. Our personal interaction with a good number of foreign faculty members who have been teaching Business Communication has confirmed the fact that this issue of cross-cultural communication, by no means can be, and should be, brushed aside in the syllabus of Business Communication.

Therefore, our study has been aimed at the following fundamentals queries: To what extent is cross-cultural communication being taken care of in the teaching-learning of Business Communication? In other words, how far are our students of different business schools being equipped to meet the challenges of communicative complexities that result from cultural diversities around the world? How far are innovation and idea generation encouraged in the Business Communication classrooms? How interesting and inventive is the teaching method to the students? Is the syllabus of this course being updated and modernized keeping in pace with the changing corporate culture of our country, and of our neighboring nations with whom we are in the process of opening new business frontiers?

8.0 METHODOLOGY

Our study has been based primarily on a qualitative survey among students of BBA programs in different universities of the country as well as executives of various companies. Now, given the limitation of time and resources, it has been quite impossible to cover the whole country. Therefore, we have focused on the Dhaka city where we have interviewed a randomly selected BBA student population of different business schools of both public and private universities and executives of several medium and large business organizations through non-structured interviews (ie, asking open-ended questions) on several dimensions of cross-cultural communication and its significance in the teaching of Business Communications. Further, we have talked to the business professionals regarding the current changes in corporate culture and the ways they adopt to deal with those.

8.1 Importance of Cross-cultural Communication

Most of our respondents have mentioned the fact that Business Communication was taught as 'merely a subject in the curriculum' where writing business letters, memos, notices and reports was, and is, their main job. The course content itself hardly allows dealing with anything beyond these. Some of them, by the way, mentioned that organizational aspects—particularly communication strategies within any organization—was handled to some extent. But then, they were given little idea regarding corporate culture.

To some students, the term 'cross-cultural communication' was quite unfamiliar, and it had to be explained to them. When we asked whether any cross-cultural business-related case studies were given them to analyze in the classroom, most of them answered in negative.

8.2 Innovation and Interest in Classrooms

Most of the students expressed that their Business Communication classrooms lacked innovation—both in terms of teaching and learning. This is specifically significant as it means, the teaching styles were not innovative, and thus learning could never be innovative too. According to the students' opinions, teachers seldom encouraged them to come up with ideas and feedbacks. One-sided lectures were what they

encountered, and therefore classes were not interesting as they had
expected.

Some remarked that it was as good as a mathematics class—where
lectures whirled round formula-type items. They had almost nothing to
do besides memorization. One student of a public university remarked
that 'to them, memorization was the exact synonym of innovation.'

8.3   Students' Awareness of the Value of Cross-cultural Aspects

However, students were found to be considerably aware of the
importance and value of cross-cultural communicative aspects regarding
the present realities in the business world. The reason behind their
awareness, as we found, was that they were more or less well informed
about the global business scenario as well as whatever had been taking
place in this sector. Interestingly, most of them had a very good idea
about the ups and downs of our corporate sector—if not specifically
about corporate culture.

When asked as to how they judged their teaching-learning of Business
Communication in the classroom in terms of their existing knowledge,
they expressed frustration and despair. All of them stressed for an
immediate improvement in this regard that can help them to acquire the
communication skills relevant to the state-of-the-art situation of the
international business sector. Two students put forward a very pertinent
question: why should we not be taught how to act in challenging cross-
cultural situations when the scope is already there? And why should we
in Business Communication classrooms be kept on taught things which
would not be hundred percent practicable in our professional lives?

8.4   Corporate Managers' Views

That the corporate culture in Bangladesh has undergone massive changes
in the last decade or so is very evident. Whether it be in the way
executives attire themselves, or the way in which they conduct their
business practices, there is now an air of professionalism about our
corporate world, which in itself is the logical result of the shift towards
globalization of business. In the past, executives wearing ties were
seldom seen; only very few private organizations followed a strict dress
code. Indeed many executives were uncomfortable and even self-

conscious about having to wear a tie, a fact that may seem alien to the present generation of executives. There is more focus on the consumer than ever before. Not only the multi-national companies but even the small companies are adopting more universal attitudes towards the running of their businesses.

This change in attitude is very much reflected in the way that companies have become more intensely focused on employee training and development. To get a clear understanding of these current changes in corporate culture, we have talked to a number of professionals working in various national, private and multinational organizations.

Though most of the representatives unanimously stated that their respective companies offered mandatory and need-based training programs, apart from luxury hotels, cross-cultural training is limited to top level management i.e. the *decision makers*. Multinational companies in particular follow specific training calendars, and employees have to go through mandatory training programs such as English language proficiency courses, problem solving & negotiating techniques, report writing and presentation skills.

Self-development training programs on leadership qualities, positive attitude and behavioral skills, teamwork are also offered along with the necessary job related training programs. However for advanced and cross-cultural training, employees are usually sent abroad. Though smaller organizations usually do not offer such intensive training programs most of them do have in-house training programs which are generally conducted by upper-level management.

9.0   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From all the discussions above, it is obvious that cross-cultural diversities cannot be brushed aside, given today's global business trends. And consequently, the suitable teaching-learning of the culture-oriented business interactions inside the classrooms have become the key to survival—both in individual and organizational terms—in this excessively competitive corporate arena. As it is evident, the classroom realities in Business Communication course in our business schools have done little to serve this cause. Of course, there persist a variety of reasons behind this—but that has not been our domain of study. As regards our small experience in dealing with cross-cultural affairs while teaching this

course and thereby receiving the desired student feedback, we categorically recommend that all drawbacks inside the classrooms be wiped out simply for the sake of our present generation of business students who are looking forward to their future accomplishment. The syllabuses and the teaching strategies must be modified and adjusted according to the ongoing actualities of our national, as well as of international, corporate trends. In short, cross-cultural dimensions should be an inevitable component of the classroom teaching-learning machinery when it comes to Business Communication.

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