**Cultural Competence**

Student’s Name

Course

Professor

Institution Affiliation

Due Date

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**Part 1: Understanding Cultural Influence on Perception**

Values, norms, and social roles profoundly color one's worldview. In this sense, an example can be drawn from the cultural worldview of African Americans in the United States, which is marked by a history of resilience, community solidarity, and civil rights struggle. It conditions perceptions about identity, merit, and justice. This is evidenced in research, which reveals they put great value on communal support networks such as churches and family as sources of emotional and social resilience. This perception is different from the culture of the bigger American society, which looks more individualistic and self-reliant (Grossmann & Santos, 2016). This conception is also supported by African American racial identity, which asserts the importance of cultural pride and community affiliation in the image of self and the image of the social world. Social and political systems are infused with racial inequality, and there are certain collective experiences that African Americans see through, experiencing social and political systems through the lens of racial inequality, wherein they become aware of systemic biases and the importance of communal solidarity.

Whether it is an emphasis on individualism, as in the United States, that manifests itself by putting personal achievement and autonomy as the priority, as opposed to collectivist cultures, like most African and Asian communities, collectivist cultures tend to reinforce the idea that values maintain the group harmony and collective responsibility. For instance, when we are reading a situation where a dispute exists among family members, a person belonging to a collectivist society may give more importance to the continuity of the family relationship whereas one coming from an individualist culture will place more relevance to the personal rights and boundaries.

Cultural norms also form the way people process facial expressions and body language. Research has found that East Asian people, whose country cultivated Confucian values of humility and social harmony, might perceive subdued emotional expressions as indications of respect (Xiaohong & Qingyuan, 2013). On the contrary, cultures from Western Europe and North America usually tend to regard direct emotional expressions as signs of authenticity and honesty. Understanding these cultural differences is essential for fostering respectful and accurate cross-cultural communication.

**Part 2: Exploring Language in Intercultural Communication**

Language is the strongest tool that shapes perceptions, stereotypes and biases of intercultural communication. Besides being a means of communicating information, it reflects the prevailing cultural values and social hierarchies. For instance, the Japanese has different speech levels (keigo) to expresses different degrees of politeness depending on the social status and relational context (Bareosova, 2015). The particular expression of hierarchical perceptions as a linguistic structure enhances the reflected feelings of respect for authority.

Language can be used either for effectiveness or to create obstacles in communicating across cultures. For example, there may be misunderstandings when idiomatic expressions are different or when a direct communication style is not used. Indirect speech is often used in East African Swahili-speaking communities to deliver criticism in a polite way. However, in contrast, English-speaking cultures might be more direct in their approach, which may be regarded as blunt or even rude, especially in cultures where indirect communication is the norm.

One example from my life took place when I spoke to a colleague from China who constantly said, maybe, and I will try. I first read these statements as uncertainty or not being 100 percent committed. Yet, I found out later that such phrases are one part of the culture's habit of not confronting and keeping harmony. This was a learning experience that language molds how we perceive things and that we must interpret messages within the context of its culture.

Stereotypes also gain reinforcement through the use of language. Linguistic labels may often be used in media representations and public discourse to group people in ways that can construct oversimplified views of cultural groups. For example, the adjective 'Third World' has heretofore had connotations of underdevelopment and poverty, so that the term affects the perception of entire regions. The mere awareness of such language can help facilitate more varied and better intercultural communication.

**Part 3: Enhancing Cultural Competence**

Developing cultural competence requires intentional strategies to foster awareness, respect, and effective communication. Active listening to the speaker in a way that gives full attention to the speaker and tries to understand his or her perspective without judgment is one effective approach. Being an active listener in itself boosts comprehension and also interprets that one is attending to different points of view with respect. Active listening is fully focusing on the speaker and not interrupting or judging the message (Flavia & Enachi-Vasluianu, 2016). Not only does this improve comprehension, but it also shows respect for the speaker's culture, which is, in fact, genuine and respectful. If we listen carefully and interpret what has been said, especially if there are differences in the culture, then we reduce misunderstandings caused by these differences. For example, knowing that some cultures are indirect communicators can keep misinterpretations from really happening and help to clear up communication. Active listening also adds to the creation of a safe and open space where different views and opinions are acknowledged.

The second important component of cultural competence is empathy. When individuals put themselves in another person’s cultural setting, they will better understand the trials and qualities that contribute to how they view the world. For example, by familiarizing oneself with the historical journeys of non dominating groups, sensitivity to their angles and decreasing unconscious prejudices is fostered.

That's why an open mind is needed in order to go through cultural differences. This is about a readiness to question the assumption you are based on and to accept other ways of thinking. Let's say, for example, in a multicultural work environment, it's beneficial to understand that different cultures deal with time management in different ways, for instance, strict punctuality versus flexible scheduling, so as to avoid misunderstandings and support problem-solving in collaboration.

Participating in cultural immersion experiences, attending diversity training programs, and engaging in reflective practices are some practical ways to build cultural competence. Spending time in communities of people nontraditional to who people are aids in cultural immersion, where people can witness and incorporate cultural norms. Journaling about intercultural experiences as part of reflective practice enables individuals to think and learn from their contact.

**Part 4: Personal Reflection and Application**

From a personal point of view, I have interacted with so many people of diverse cultural backgrounds and how important it is to have cultural competence. A challenge I had was misunderstanding nonverbal cues when I met a friend from India. For a while, I thought their frequent nodding was agreement until I realized that it was a cultural nod, meaning attentive rather than agreement. Clarity, therefore, was crucial in the matter of meaning, as well as in the shaping of culture through communication.

When I was engaged with cooperating with international partners, there was a great success when I used active listening and openness, which helped me understand how my partners work. I helped build a safe space with my encouragement of each person to share their points of view and to be validated for their contributions. Not only did this approach increase our group dynamics, it taught me to appreciate difference in culture.

Finally, this project expanded my sense of complexity involved in intercultural communication. Now I realize that cultural competence is something that is never finished and must continue to be learned and to review self. This mindset enables me to better manage the interactions with the cultures.

**Part 5: Conclusion**

This project assignment has provided a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between culture, perception, and language. I have learned that cultural competence is important because cultural factors impact perception and can be the determining factor of how language is used in intercultural communication. Intercultural communication does not necessarily equal culture differences and knowledge of them but also the ability to incorporate cultural differences into an approach that is respectful to others and they respect. Becoming culturally competent is an ongoing process in the development of more enriched and necessary relationships among people in the world we live in. By using techniques like active listening, empathy, and an open mind, the person can ease the cultural gaps and create a warm relationship. As we engage with more and more diverse communities, we are giving ourselves the ability to become part of a more encompassing, inclusive, and understanding global society by becoming culturally competent.

References

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