Socio-Cultural Determination of Cross-Cultural Communication of Students Studying Abroad

Liubov RYUMSHINA
Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia

Keywords: Socio-Cultural Values, Cultural Dimensions, Cross-Cultural Communication, Students

Abstract. Cross-cultural interaction is based on universal and socio-cultural values, internalized by partners. The aim of this work is to analyze the socio-cultural values that affect the cross-cultural communication of students studying abroad. The paper considers the significance for cross-cultural communication of the correspondence of the basic cultural dimensions of “one's own” and “foreign” culture. The correspondence of some of them is important for mutual understanding with students, the correspondence of others is important for establishing contacts with teachers. As an illustration, the socio-cultural values of Chinese and Russian cultures are compared. The implementation of socio-cultural values depends on the social order values, therefore two cultures that are similar in basic cultural dimensions may differ greatly in moral principles, etc. There are other factors that determine adaptation to another culture. The absence of one of the factors can be compensated by others, which creates unlimited opportunities for cross-cultural adaptation and communication.

1. Introduction

The cultural conditionality of human existence has been the focus of psychologists since W. Wundt wrote “Völkerpsychologie”—one of the first attempts to begin a specific study of the interaction of culture and individual consciousness. A great contribution to understanding the historical and cultural context of human existence was made by the works of W. Dilthey, M. Weber, E. Durkheim, O. Spengler, M. Bloch, L. Levy-Bruhl, C. Levi-Strauss, M. Mead, L. Febvre, as well as Soviet scientists (Vygotsky, P. Florensky, etc.).

Due to this, in the XX century for the first time, the significance of cultural diversity as a civilization value was understood, where the social environment is seen as the main source of personality development that contributes to interiorization—the transformation of external cultural signs and symbols (language, non-verbal means, etc.) into internal ones during the interpersonal communication [1]. The originality of each culture primarily in its own way of placing values that are common to all people [2]. They underlie cross-cultural interaction, determining the development of tolerance, acceptance and understanding of representatives of other cultures, etc. Of these, each culture adopts values, making them their own, socio-cultural values. At the same time, they will be closely linked to the values of a particular type of social order [3, 4, 5, etc.].

As a continuation of the ideas of the cultural conditionality of human communication in the XXI century, studies of mentality, cultural intelligence, allowing its bearer to carry out effective cross-cultural communication [6, 7, 8], cross-cultural competence [9, 10], etc, became extremely relevant.

There are no completely identical cultures, therefore it is possible to agree with some scholars [11, 12, etc.], that adaptation to a “foreign” culture will depend, first of all, on how much “your own” and “foreign” cultures correspond according to the main value orientations, or, according to terminology by G. Hofstede, cultural dimensions [13].

Let's take a look at the role of the correspondence of different cultures' values in solving the problems of cross-cultural communication of students studying abroad. Various studies, including ours [14, 15, 16], show that most of the problems connected with the adaptation of students to such education are
related to their interaction, on the one hand, with students of other nationalities, and on the other hand, with teachers and administration.

2. Cultural Dimensions Promoting Cross-Cultural Communication

There are many classifications of cultures in accordance with the various criteria underlying them. As is known, most of them were created in connection with the analysis of business relations, although recently they have been used more widely in various cross-cultural studies. In our opinion, they are applicable to the educational activity of students, as it is also a certain type of activity, determined by the same factors, the need to enter the team, to establish interaction with fellow students, as well as with the administration and teachers.

Let us consider only some of the cultural dimensions, the most important, in our opinion, for understanding the correspondence of the cultural premises of interpersonal relations.

The first is individualism—collectivism [13, 17]. It is no coincidence that this is the most common characteristic of culture, because it is this cultural dimension, along with ones similar in their essence (Self-dependence—Self-independence [18], monologue—dialogue) that shows the value of human relations.

From the definition of collectivist-individualistic cultures it is clear that they are antipodes according to the characteristic “I”—“We”, therefore it is rather difficult for students representing the collectivist culture to adapt to individualistic culture. And what will happen to the adaptation of representatives, for example, of one collectivist culture to another culture which is the same in terms of this indicator?

As is known, the main values of a collectivist culture are mutual assistance, hospitality, generosity, which contributes to the acceptance of “strangers” into it, especially representatives of another collectivist culture, where the interpersonal relationships are also significant. The avoidance of conflicts and the pronoun “I” is characteristic for this type of culture and it helps students to establish relationships with both fellow students and teachers.

However, each collectivist culture forms its own community “We”, in which group goals are more important than individual ones, the value of a separate human life is sacrificed to the interests of the group. In order to adapt to this ”We”, it is often not enough to be a representative of another collectivist culture. You need to accept this "We", to become one of its members. Two collectivist cultures can be contrasted as “We” and “They” to some extent, if their other characteristics and the values of their social order do not correspond. Of prime importance is the correspondence of ideas about moral/immoral, which depends not only on the cultural dimension, but also on the social development of the country. For example, in the twentieth century, Russia changed its social order three times. Remaining essentially a collectivist culture, the change of social formations in this country sometimes radically changed traditions, code of conduct, and the ideas of what is “bad” and “good”.

The division into monoactive, polyactive and reactive cultures [19] is largely consonant with the cultural dimension of collectivism-individualism. Polyactive cultures are human oriented. Representatives of these cultures are mobile, sociable, emotional in their relationships with people. It is easier for students representing two polyactive cultures to reach an understanding than with representatives of a monoactive business-oriented culture. However, in monoactive cultures decisions are backed by collective work, a respectful attitude towards the authorities is observed, which brings monoactive cultures closer to collectivist cultures. For students representing such cultures, these correspondences can be a starting point for adaptation to a monoactive culture.

It will be easier for students representing cultures with a high level of uncertainty avoidance [13] to adapt to the same culture due to a compressed communication style, resulting from high anxiety. An accurate communication style will promote understanding among students representing cultures with a low level of uncertainty avoidance.
This is also true in relation to the cultural dimension of low contextuality—high contextuality [20]. It will be much easier for students representing low contextual cultures to understand each other due to intolerance to ambiguity, correspondence of frankness and clarity of means of expressing emotional state, direct style of verbal communication, which is also characteristic of individualistic cultures [21]. At the same time, communication with representatives of highly contextual cultures, with their desire to avoid conflicts, addiction to non-verbal communication tools that give meaningfulness to communication, can disrupt their cross-cultural communication.

Due to the communication style, it will be difficult to reach understanding among students representing a neutral culture [17] with representatives of an emotional culture, whose speech is not only emotional, but also quick. They tend to vigorously show their emotions, interrupt a communication partner, which is unacceptable for representatives of neutral cultures.

It is easy to guess that the next cultural dimension—power distance (horizontal-vertical scale according to H. Triandis [11], to a certain extent cultures oriented at social origin and merits according to F. Trompenaars [22]) is extremely important for establishing relations of students with teachers and administration of educational institutions. In cultures with a high power distance, it is the main value and gives huge advantages to the one who possesses it [23]. Therefore, it will be easier for student representing a culture with a high power distance, having shown the helpfulness and conformism characteristic of these cultures, to adapt to the same culture where there is a significant distance between students and teachers, and authoritarianism of the latter is allowed.

In a culture with a low power distance, students will consider themselves equal in the educational process with teachers. Such behavior may not be understood or accepted by the latter if they are representatives of cultures with a high power distance.

The correspondence of the cultural dimensions of masculinity-femininity [13], cultures of universal and particular truths, cultures with different approaches to time and nature (internally and externally controlled according to Trompenaars [17]), in our opinion, is not so significant for cross-cultural communication.

Since the expansion of Sino-Russian relations has been observed recently, which involves the exchange of students, in particular, let us illustrate the correspondence of the value orientations of Russian and Chinese cultures (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The main parameters of Chinese cultures</th>
<th>The main parameters of Russian cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collectivist, high power distance, high contextuality, cultures of particular truths, culture, oriented at social origin, Sequential approach to time, Self-dependence, reactive culture, neutral culture, focus on the past</td>
<td>Collectivist, high power distance, high contextuality, cultures of particular truths, culture, oriented at social origin, Sequential approach to time, Self-dependence, polyactive, emotional culture, focus on the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Other Factors of Cross-Cultural Communication.

The mismatch of the basic characteristics of cultures does not make misunderstanding between their representatives inevitable. G. Hofstede wrote [13] that generalizations about the culture of one country describe average indicators. Cultural aspects make it possible to distinguish between countries, but do not necessarily determine the identities of individuals. Moreover, cultural homogeneity cannot be taken for granted in countries that include several cultural groups or in which there are socially dominant and subordinate cultural groups.
We should add that in order to be a typical representative of a particular culture it is not enough to be born in it, you need to be brought up in its traditions, interiorize, make its values your own. This contributes to folklore. All tales, parables, etc. are the regulatory center of the collective unconscious. They summarize the notions of archetypes, universal basis of life, code of conduct in a particular culture and attitude to representatives of other cultures [5, etc.].

As is clear from the previous analysis, not only socio-cultural, but also social values influence the process of adaptation to another culture. Social orders “overlap” with socio-cultural traditions, can contribute to their prosperity or hinder it. Another important factor is religion, which also defines the cultural context of human existence.

The difficulties of adaption to another culture that does not even correspond according to the main characteristics can be compensated by personal characteristics: motivation, endurance and stamina, existence of higher purpose, and cultural intelligence. It is known, for example, that young people with well-developed intellect adapt faster in a different culture [12]. This can be facilitated by communicative and social competence, etc. All this affects competence in the field of cross-cultural interaction, which, nevertheless, is based on internalized universal and socio-cultural values.

4. Summary

So, communication is determined, on the one hand, by universal values. This allows a person to understand another person (regardless of his nationality) and be understood by him. It should be noted that the assimilation of universal values creates great opportunities for adaptation to foreign cultures. Therefore, it would seem, there should not be a cultural shock problem, as a state of mal adaptation of a person who has gotten into a foreign culture.

But on the other hand, interpersonal interaction is governed by socio-cultural values. There are no completely identical cultures. Even when the main cultural dimensions correspond, there are still social values, traditions and codes of conduct, mentality, moral ideas, etc.

Of great importance for establishing optimal cross-cultural communication is not only the similarity of cultures, but also the lack of a history of conflict relations between countries or cultures, the possibility of cultural contact between them [12].

Finally, personality characteristics play an important role in adaptation and acculturation. The adaptation of students studying abroad will depend on the sum total of all these factors. The absence of one of the factors can be compensated by others, which creates unlimited opportunities for cross-cultural adaptation and communication.

References


