



Enhancing Cultural Awareness through Intercultural Communication in the Secondary School Curriculum in Ibadan North Local Government, Oyo State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The multi-ethnic composition of Nigeria since its inception has made interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds inevitable, including among school students. This necessitated the inclusion of intercultural communication studies in the school curriculum. Researchers in intercultural communication have conducted several studies on this subject, such as how students interact with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as how cultural differences and personal adjustment challenges affect Nigerian students' language acquisition and adaptation patterns. Consequently, this study examined the influence of the school curriculum on students' cultural awareness and social interaction through culture-related subjects such as Social Studies and extracurricular activities like Cultural Day. The findings reveal that the school curriculum, to some extent, cannot serve as a strong institution for teaching individuals about cultural values beyond their own. The results also suggest that incorporating practices that educate students about the values of other cultures can help prevent cultural conflicts. This is based on the understanding that one of the key ways to relate peacefully and meaningfully with others, regardless of cultural background, is by understanding their culture. Owing to the results, the study recommends that culture-related subjects and activities should be deliberately and effectively taught and engaged to ensure a comprehensive influence on all students.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, School curriculum, Cultural awareness, social interaction, and Cultural day.

Introduction

For several decades, Nigerians have coexisted regardless of their cultural affiliations due to various factors such as economic activities, business, education, politics, and more. One of the key contributors to this coexistence is internal migration, which has led people to move from one part of the country to another. As a result, all six geopolitical zones (North-Central, North-East, North-West, South-East, South-South, and South-West) have residents who are not indigenous to those regions—living, schooling, working, and intermarrying within the host communities. According to Adeyinka and Akinsola (2021), Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages, making cultural conflicts inevitable. Historically, the country's heterogeneous ethnic composition has led to recurring ethnic clashes (Olubomehin, 2012). Although this coexistence has not been entirely free of the challenges posed by cultural differences, such challenges have been managed to a certain extent and can continue to be managed through various means, primarily communication and education aimed at promoting cultural awareness. Best practices for conflict resolution in multicultural settings include intercultural mediation, cultural awareness, inclusive policies, proactive prevention, and community-based approaches (Jason, 2023).

Dauda and Umaru (2015) point out that “communication becomes a much more complex task when it involves people across cultures because individuals often view the world through their culturally perceived lenses, which influence and shape their understanding of the world around them.” This observation suggests that peaceful coexistence among people of diverse cultural backgrounds requires that individuals be understood from their cultural perspectives, rather than being judged through another cultural lens due to a lack of cultural awareness. Culture is one of the key elements that differentiates individuals. When cultural differences are not bridged through mutual understanding, they may lead to division. Culture also significantly influences communication, as the society one belongs to determines the

communication styles one adopts. Giris (2016) asserts that communication and culture profoundly affect each other.

Culture shapes communication styles. The inability of individuals to interact meaningfully with people from other cultures within the same society can lead to cultural conflict. This inability is often rooted in individualistic tendencies shaped by factors such as prejudice, bias, stereotyping, discrimination, and ethnocentrism—all of which serve as barriers to intercultural relationships. This idea is illustrated in Genesis 11:1–9, where the people's shared language enabled them to work together on a unified project. However, once their language was confused, misunderstanding set in, and they could no longer continue their work. Verses 7 and 8 (Revised Standard Version) state: “7 Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off the building.” The misunderstanding caused by language differences highlights the critical role language plays in cultural tolerance.

Dang (2016), citing Novinger (2011), affirms: “In the world, the need for communication between people of different cultures has increased greatly. Language is an obstacle to intercultural communication, but the greater challenge is navigating the cultural differences. It is estimated that from two-thirds to three-fourths of our communication is nonverbal and behavioural.” In a cross-cultural study of communication patterns, Elegbe and Nwachukwu (2017) emphasize that culture has a significant influence on how people communicate. They argue that cultural differences must be studied and harnessed for the benefit of all ethnic groups. Such understanding, they assert, could help prevent disasters resulting from poor intercultural communication practices and reduce tendencies toward ethnocentrism.

Achu (2019) conducted a study that revealed that cultural differences and personal adjustment issues have impacted Nigerian students' language acquisition and adaptation patterns. His research, which

focused on the intercultural communication competence of Nigerian students in various Chinese universities, showed that most had little or no prior sociocultural knowledge of the host country. These students reported challenges in social, educational, cultural, and personal adjustment, which they attributed to limited intercultural communication knowledge, culture shock, ethnocentrism, racial discrimination, and differences in nonverbal communication. Olubomehin (2012), citing studies on ethnic crises, concluded that conflicts often arise from a lack of cultural tolerance or understanding. This highlights the significance of cultural knowledge in preventing conflict and promoting harmonious coexistence. Education thus plays a vital role in imparting such knowledge. According to Javed et al (2016), “education has become one of the clearest indicators of life outcomes such as employment, income, and social status, and is a strong predictor of attitudes, wellbeing, and quality of life.” Education, therefore, provides a structured platform for teaching and learning and can serve as a powerful tool for promoting cultural awareness.

It helps to reduce common conflicts among diverse populations in urban settings. Considering this, the Nigerian educational system includes the teaching of culture-related subjects and activities, as stated in Nigeria’s National Policy on Education. Section 1, Sub-section 10(a) of the 2014 edition asserts: “Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo, and Yorùbá.” The Federal Ministry of Education Handbook (2019) further affirms this policy, stating its mission to run a language clinic for the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the extent to which culture-related subjects and activities embedded in the school curriculum contribute to promoting cultural awareness and fostering intercultural

relationships among students—and, by extension, within the broader Nigerian society. Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition means that its population is characterized by a wide range of cultural affiliations, encompassing differences in language (both verbal and nonverbal), beliefs, practices, perceptions, and interpretations. These variations, while enriching, also make the country susceptible to ethnic tensions and conflicts. Historically, Nigeria has witnessed several instances of ethnic unrest that highlight the fragility of intercultural relations. Notable examples include the 1945 violence in Jos between the Igbo and Hausa communities, the 1963–1964 crisis involving the same groups, and the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970. Other conflicts include the Ketu and Mile 12 crises of 1992 and 1999 between the Yoruba and Hausa, the 1999 Bodija market crisis in Ibadan, the communal clash in Sagamu that same year between the Yoruba and Hausa, and the 1999 clash in Kano between the Hausa and Fulani. As Kalejaiye and Alliyu (2013) observe, Nigeria is indeed a multicultural society, with ethnicity forming the bedrock of this multiculturalism. While formal education is not the only avenue through which cultural sensitivity can be developed, it remains one of the most effective tools for shaping young minds and promoting mutual understanding among people of diverse backgrounds. Through well-structured cultural education, schools can play a pivotal role in reducing cultural misunderstandings and strengthening the bonds of national unity.

Research Questions

1. How do culture-related subjects and extracurricular activities result in cultural awareness?
2. To what extent does the knowledge of cultural differences help achieve cultural sensitivity?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine whether culture-related subjects and activities embedded in the school curriculum have any effect on creating cultural sensitivity, thereby influencing intercultural relationships among students. Accordingly, the study aims to:

1. Examine how culture-related subjects and extracurricular activities contribute to cultural awareness.
2. Assess the extent to which knowledge of cultural differences promotes cultural sensitivity.

Review of Literature

Concept Review

Inter-Cultural Communication

Dauda and Umaru (2015) assert that “communication becomes a much more complex task when it involves people across cultures because individuals often view the world through their culturally perceived lenses, thus influencing and shaping their understanding of the world around them.” This assertion implies that for peaceful coexistence among people of diverse cultural affiliations, it is essential that an individual’s culture be understood from their cultural perspective and not judged through the lens of another. Human beings, by nature, cannot exist in isolation; they need to coexist with others regardless of culture, race, belief, or environment to maintain peace and harmony. Simona (2013) states, “If we are not knowledgeable about the basic communication and behaviour-related rules about the cultures we encounter, we cannot successfully fit into the knowledge society.” Hence, intercultural communication is inevitable.

Human relationships span various areas of life, including business, academics, politics, and health. Peace is a key imperative—it is necessary to determine whether people from different cultures can coexist without conflict. Economically, intercultural communication enables businesses to expand beyond their

immediate environments, which is a hallmark of globalization. Technologically, it facilitates the dissemination of information to remote areas via traditional media and the internet. In terms of self-awareness, it enables individuals to understand their own culture, discouraging them from judging others from an uninformed or biased cultural standpoint. Ethically, it fosters understanding of the norms that govern different cultures. Demographically, it aids in recognizing the characteristics of specific cultural groups, such as ethnicity, race, gender, and religion. Politically, it helps promote inclusive policies that reflect cultural diversity.

Culture

Undoubtedly, the culture to which one belongs significantly shapes one's perspectives about the world, its elements, and the people in it. Naik et al (2023) posit that "culture encompasses many aspects of human life, such as shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviours. Cultures often vary by region or location, and they can change and evolve." Dauda and Umaru (2015) affirm that culture "is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves."

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is a tool that fosters awareness, enabling individuals to become informed about the cultures of others. As a result, it helps bridge the gaps that may arise from cultural differences and similarities, thereby enhancing human coexistence. Cardona et al (2015) assert that "cultural awareness becomes central when we must interact with people from another culture. People see, interpret, and evaluate things in different ways, and something that is considered appropriate behaviour in one culture is frequently inappropriate in another." Cultural sensitivity primarily helps overcome intercultural communication barriers such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and language differences. The importance of cultural sensitivity is further emphasized in the assertion by Kowalski

(2023), “Develop your intercultural sensitivity—and confidently manage personal and business relations in an intercultural environment! With this book, you will learn why we all act ‘automatically’ in interactions with people from other groups and cultures, and how you can counteract these automatisms.”

Theoretical Framework

Behaviourist Theory

Behaviourist theory, one of the three main theories of learning, was founded by Pavlov, Watson, Thorndike, Guthrie, and Skinner. Bacanlı (n.d.) posits that “according to behaviourists, people are not good or bad from birth. Experiences and environment constitute a human’s personality. According to them, the human brain can be compared to a black box. Neither can we know what is going on in this black box, nor do we need to know it. What is important is not what is happening inside this black box, but rather what goes into it (input) and what comes out of it (output).” Woollard (2010:1) adds that “behaviourism is a theory of animal and human learning that focuses on the behaviour of the learner and the behaviour change that occurs when learning takes place. Learning, in the context of behaviourism, can be defined as the acquisition of a new behaviour or the modification of behaviour because of teaching, training, or tutoring.”

Based on the tenets of these theories, this study seeks to examine their effectiveness in determining whether individuals can adjust from their own cultural background to accommodate people of different cultures. Feng (2009), as cited by Lutz (2017), notes that the most difficult part of being culturally sensitive is shifting one’s thoughts and actions to best present and align oneself with others. In addition, the theories will be used to test whether an individual’s knowledge of other people’s cultures fosters cultural awareness—an awareness that can sensitise individuals to the point of developing effective intercultural relationships. Furthermore, Fouad and Arredondo (2007) and Spitzberg and Changnon (2009),

as cited by Buchtel (2014), assert that “knowledge of cultural differences is one of the basic requirements for achieving cultural sensitivity, and discovering cultural differences is fundamental to cultural psychology research.”

Empirical Review

In a study conducted by Jeong-KO (2008), titled “*A Case Study of Intercultural Communication in a Multicultural Classroom in the Brisbane Metropolitan Area*”, the researcher examined intercultural communication in a primary school in Australia. The study investigated how students interact with people from different backgrounds and how teachers prepare students to engage with others regardless of their cultural differences. It found that the varying language abilities of both students and teachers had the greatest impact on intercultural communication, as language was observed to influence both positive and negative interactions in the classroom. Furthermore, the researcher discovered that students generally held positive attitudes towards peers from different cultures, resulting in few hostile incidents when communicating with those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Similarly, Achu (2019), in her study titled “*Intercultural Communication Problems of Nigerian Students in Mainland China*,” examined the intercultural communication competence of Nigerian students studying in various Chinese universities. The findings revealed that most of these students had no prior socio-cultural knowledge of the host country and encountered difficulties in their social, educational, cultural, and personal adaptation. These challenges were attributed to a lack of intercultural communication knowledge, culture shock, ethnocentrism, racial discrimination, and differences in nonverbal communication across cultures. Consequently, one of the study’s key recommendations was the introduction of a multicultural curriculum, the integration of intercultural studies into language education, and, most importantly, the organisation of orientation programmes by the Nigerian embassy before students’ departure.

Oladapo and Aladejebi (2016), in their study titled *A Study of Intercultural Communication in a Multicultural Classroom in Ondo State*, investigated the effect of cultural background on students' friendships at the Federal Technical College, Ikare, Ondo State. The results indicated that cultural background did not significantly affect communication among the students. It was also found that students' cultural beliefs did not negatively impact their classroom interactions.

More recently, Chaika (2024), in her study *Intercultural Communication in Multicultural Education: Strategies, Challenges, and Opportunities*, examined the complex challenges posed by cultural differences, linguistic diversity, and power dynamics within educational settings. The study revealed that acknowledging and addressing issues such as a lack of knowledge and skills, limited access to culturally relevant professional development, inadequate training in intercultural communication, and insufficient institutional support for diversity initiatives would enable educators and stakeholders to collaboratively establish educational environments that are truly inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive—ultimately empowering every student to succeed and thrive.

Research Methodology

This study employed a survey design method alongside focus group discussions and in-depth interviews for data collection. The survey design was used to gather data from students, while focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers to validate and interpret students' responses. This research method was selected in line with the objective of the study, which is to examine how culture-related subjects and extracurricular activities contribute to cultural awareness. To address the question regarding the impact of the school curriculum and the Nigerian Education Policy on creating cultural awareness and educating individuals about their own culture and that of others, the study population was drawn from secondary school students in Years 1 and 3. This choice was based on the

provisions of the National Policy on Education (2014) and the Federal Ministry of Education Handbook (2019), both of which emphasise promoting social interaction, national cohesion, and cultural preservation through the school curriculum. This population was chosen because they are directly impacted by the policy and serve as the primary recipients of its implementation. Consequently, a total of 300 students were selected across five secondary schools within Ibadan North Local Government, Oyo State, Nigeria—comprising both private and government-owned schools, and one teacher was selected from each school. The schools adopted for the study include: Abadina College, Abadina Grammar School, International School Ibadan (ISI), Methodist Grammar School, and Orita Mefa Baptist Model School.

Data Analysis

This section presents and analyses the data gathered for the study through both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The data obtained from the completed questionnaire are presented in tabular format and analysed using frequencies and percentages, while the data derived from the in-depth interviews are transcribed and analysed with a focus on the study.

Table 4.1: How culture-related subjects and extracurricular activities result in cultural awareness

Variables	No		Little		Large extent		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The school curriculum is multicultural	18	7.6	119	50.0	101	42.4	238	100
Culture-related subject helps to learn about other cultures	07	2.9	76	31.9	155	65.1	238	100
Extra-curricular activities help to learn about other cultures	16	6.7	115	48.3	107	45.0	238	100

Table 4.1 presents the respondents' views on how culture-related subjects and extracurricular activities contribute to cultural awareness, based on four variables. The data was generated through the questionnaires distributed among respondents. For the first variable, the results indicate that the school curriculum is multicultural, though only to a small extent. Regarding whether culture-related subjects help students learn about other cultures, the findings show that they do, and to a large extent. Concerning whether extracurricular activities promote learning about other cultures, the results suggest they do, but only to a limited extent. Lastly, on whether students have more knowledge of other cultures than their own because of the school curriculum, the responses indicate that they do, but again, only to a small extent.

These findings from the questionnaire are supported by data from the interviews. In addition, the teachers interviewed shared their perspectives on whether culture-related subjects—such as Social Studies—and events like Cultural Day contribute to cultural awareness. One of the teachers, *Mrs J. Adesina of Oritamefa Baptist Model School*, states that:

“We have lots of ways by which things like this influence our cultural awareness some which are when we interact with people from other cultures, for instance on cultural day, students are subjected to represent different cultures even some places they have never been to, they are expected to research, to know about such culture, they are expected to know the way they dress and to imitate that, they are expected to know the kind of food this people eat, they are expected to know their general ways of life, their mode of greetings, the way they dance and all that pertains to this culture. Student will search for these; they imitate some of these that are within their reach, and by this, it exposes them, one of the influences or the basic thing that influences exposure. It exposes them to things about other people, places they have never been to, which gives them knowledge about them.

Table 4.2: Respondents’ knowledge of other cultures

Respondents know other cultures	No		Little		Large extent		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	182	76.5	47	19.7	09	3.8	238	100

Table 4.2 reveals respondents’ knowledge of other cultures concerning cultural sensitivity generated through the questionnaire. The data show that a large percentage of the respondents have little to no knowledge of other cultures, while only a few possess such knowledge to a small extent.

Table 4.3 Respondents’ responses on the source of their knowledge about other culture

Sources of Respondents’ Knowledge of Other Cultures	School		Home		Religious centres		Movie		Friend		Others (internet & social media)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	111	46.6	62	26.1	18	7.6	29	12.2	17	7.1	01	0.4

Table 4.3 presents respondents’ views on the sources of their knowledge about other cultures generated through the questionnaire. The table indicates that a large percentage (46.6%) of the respondents learned about other cultures from school. One of the students stated in response to an open-ended question: *“I was taught about other cultures in school by my friends, teachers, and corpers.”*

Table 4.4 Influence of Intercultural Communication on the ability to manage cultural differences

Variables	No		Little		Large extent		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Respondents relate to other cultures in the same way as those of his/her own culture	12	5.0	119	50.0	107	45.9	238	100
Cultural differences affect socio-cultural interaction	131	55.0	85	35.7	22	9.2	238	100
Knowledge of other cultures helps socio-cultural interaction	30	12.6	142	59.7	66	27.7	238	100

Table 4.4 presents respondents' views on the extent to which knowledge of intercultural communication influences their ability to manage cultural differences, which was generated through the questionnaires distributed among the respondents. Regarding whether respondents relate with people from other cultures the same way they relate with those from their own culture, a large percentage indicated that they do. For the variable assessing whether cultural differences affect socio-cultural interaction, the results show that most respondents believe cultural differences affect such interactions only to a small extent. However, when asked whether knowledge of other cultures enhances socio-cultural interaction, 66 respondents (27.7%) affirmed that it does to a large extent. This suggests that understanding other cultures significantly contributes to improved socio-cultural interaction.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study reveal that the school curriculum, which includes culture-related subjects such as Social Studies and extracurricular activities like Cultural Day, is multicultural in content, though only to a limited extent. Nevertheless, it contributes to creating cultural awareness among students and enables them to appreciate diverse cultures in their environment. This result aligns with the submission of Ajitoni (2014)

in *Enhancing Nigerian Students' Intercultural Competence and Achievement in Social Studies Through Outdoor Activities*, where he argued that “outdoor activities should be embraced by teachers to improve intercultural competence and achievement in Social Studies among Nigerian students.” The study also supports the findings of Nakpodia (2010) in *Culture and Curriculum Development in Nigerian Schools*, who stated that “since curriculum comes to be used as regards education, the only general view about it is that it is a programme of studies to be completed by teachers and learners, which needs to be developed through the influences of the society’s culture.”

Furthermore, the findings show that a large percentage of students do not have knowledge of other cultures—only a few do. The study established that the primary source of respondents’ knowledge about other cultures is the school, with other contributing sources being the home, religious centres, movies, friends, and the internet. This result strengthens the submission of Oladapo and Aladejebi (2016) in their study on *Intercultural Communication in Multicultural Classrooms in Ondo State*, where they asserted that “curriculum planners should also include cultural teaching in the curriculum at all levels of education so that people will appreciate other cultures, which will promote unity among the people.” Additionally, one of the respondents wrote in the open-ended section of the questionnaire: “I was taught about other cultures in school, by my friends, teachers, corpers...” The study also found that a large percentage of respondents relate to individuals from different cultures in the same way they do with those from their own culture. This supports their claim that cultural differences affect socio-cultural interaction only to a small extent. Overall, the findings are consistent with the Behaviourist Theory, which posits that behaviour can be influenced through learning. Therefore, learning about other cultures enables students to relate better to people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

This study affirms that the school curriculum is multicultural, though to a minimal extent. As a result, students have limited opportunities to adequately learn about their own culture and the cultures of others. However, if knowledge of other cultures is acquired, it will enable students to engage effectively in intercultural communication. In addition, exposure to cultural differences through the school curriculum has significant potential to foster cultural awareness among students, if fully utilised. Therefore, in a multicultural society like Nigeria, intercultural relationships through intercultural communication are both possible and essential.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that culture-related subjects be given utmost attention. Although schools serve as platforms for promoting cultural awareness, the impact remains minimal, as not all respondents possess adequate knowledge about other cultures. Therefore, culture should be deliberately and effectively taught to ensure it has a comprehensive influence on all students. In addition, cultural education should be delivered in a way that discourages stereotypes associated with various ethnic groups. For example, some students wrote in the essay section that people from the *Igbo* ethnic group “can kill for money,” those from the *Hausa* ethnic group “are dirty,” and those from the *Yoruba* ethnic group “are proud.” These generalized stereotypes are not true for all individuals and are, in fact, harmful misconceptions.

Also, the Ministry of Education should promote culture-related activities by establishing culture-based clubs in schools, like other extracurricular clubs. These clubs should encourage social interaction and cultural inclusion. Furthermore, the Ministry should ensure the effective implementation of educational policies aimed at promoting Nigeria’s indigenous cultures.

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