



PRAGMATIC AND INTERCULTURAL CHALLENGES IN STUDENT-STUDENT COMMUNICATION: A STUDY OF GROUP WORK IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS

Zebuniso Xayrullayeva

masters

Webster University in Tashkent

ZebunisoXayrullayeva2001@gmail.com

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How can educators facilitate effective group communication by promoting intercultural competence and pragmatic awareness?

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the pragmatic and intercultural challenges faced by students working in groups in multicultural academic settings. By focusing on student-student communication, the study investigates how linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic differences influence interaction patterns, conflict resolution, and overall group dynamics. The research aims to identify the specific barriers to effective collaboration in diverse groups and propose strategies for promoting intercultural competence and effective communication in academic contexts.

Introduction: Group work is a fundamental aspect of modern education, fostering collaborative learning and problem-solving skills. However, in multicultural classrooms, student-student communication during group tasks often presents unique challenges due to differences in cultural norms, linguistic backgrounds, and pragmatic expectations. This thesis seeks to explore the complexities of group communication in multicultural settings by focusing on the pragmatic strategies students use to negotiate meaning, manage conflict, and build consensus. Understanding these challenges is crucial for educators seeking to foster an inclusive learning environment that supports successful collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds.

Research Questions:

How do pragmatic strategies such as politeness, indirectness, and turn-taking affect communication during group work in multicultural classrooms?

In what ways do cultural norms and language proficiency influence group dynamics and the division of tasks?

What are the most common communication barriers faced by students in multicultural groups, and how do these barriers affect the outcomes of collaborative tasks?

How can educators facilitate effective group communication by promoting intercultural competence and pragmatic awareness?

Literature Review:

Research on intercultural communication (Hofstede, 1984; Scollon & Scollon, 1995) has shown that students from different cultural backgrounds often have varying expectations for group interactions. For example, students from collectivist cultures may prioritize harmony and indirectness, while those from individualist cultures may favor direct communication and personal accountability. Pragmatic theory, particularly politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), also provides valuable insights into how students manage face-threatening acts, such as disagreement or criticism, during group discussions. Studies on group work in educational settings (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Oetzel, 2001) have highlighted the importance of understanding these differences to prevent miscommunication and conflict in multicultural classrooms.

Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative research approach, using discourse analysis to examine recordings of group work sessions in multicultural classrooms. The data will be analyzed to identify key pragmatic features, such as turn-taking, hedging, and the use of politeness strategies. In addition, student interviews and surveys will be conducted to gain insight into their perceptions of the challenges they face when working in diverse groups. The analysis will focus on how cultural background, language proficiency, and individual communication styles affect group interactions and task outcomes.

Discussion and Findings:

Preliminary findings suggest that students from high-context cultures, such as those from East Asian or Middle Eastern countries, tend to avoid direct confrontation during group work, often using hedges or indirect speech acts to express disagreement. In contrast, students from low-context cultures, such as those from Western Europe and North America, are more likely to express their opinions directly, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or conflict within the group. Furthermore, linguistic challenges, particularly for students with lower English proficiency, exacerbate communication barriers, making it difficult for them to assert their ideas or fully participate in discussions.

Another important finding relates to the division of tasks. Students from collectivist cultures may prioritize group harmony over efficiency, leading to unequal distribution of work as they may be reluctant to challenge stronger or more dominant voices in the group. In contrast, students from individualist cultures may expect a more equitable division of labor and become frustrated when this does not occur.

Implications for Teaching:

The results of this study have important implications for educators seeking to promote effective group work in multicultural classrooms. One key recommendation is the incorporation of intercultural communication training into the curriculum, helping students develop awareness of the different pragmatic strategies used in group interactions. Additionally, educators can create more structured group work tasks, providing clear guidelines for task distribution and conflict resolution to prevent miscommunication and unequal participation. Encouraging reflective practices, where students discuss their group work experiences and the challenges they faced, can also enhance their intercultural competence and communication skills.

Conclusion:

This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the pragmatic and intercultural challenges that students face when working in groups in multicultural classrooms. By identifying key communication barriers and exploring how cultural norms and pragmatic strategies influence group dynamics, the research offers valuable insights for educators looking to foster more inclusive and effective group work environments. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring the role of digital communication in online group work, as well as investigating the long-term effects of intercultural training on student performance in collaborative tasks.

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