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## **“TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE MULTICULTURAL CONTACT ZONE IN THE UAE”**

### **Abstract:**

Intercultural communication has become an integral component of business communication teaching. For many years, simplistic cultural stereotypes have dominated much of the literature of international business communication and textbooks. In recent years however, key researchers in the field of professional communication have emphasized the importance of the common principles of communication (Goby, 1999; Morrison, Weldy and Icenogle, 1997; Beamer, 2000; Hunsinger, 2005). As Scollon and Scollon point out, “cultures do not talk to each other; individuals do” (1995:125). Thus, business communication teaching should not be dominated by an ethnocentric perspective that examines cultural differences. Instead, it needs to move towards unifying rather than diversifying approaches, and in order to achieve better understanding of cross-cultural communication, we cannot focus on cultural differences but find our similarities. Despite the importance of cultural diversity, a nucleus of similar business communication activities exists alongside culturally determined differences.

Although intercultural communication is an essential part of international business, most research in the field has been done in the West. In spite of the rapid economic development in the United Arab Emirates and other countries in the region, there is insignificant amount of research conducted to identify graduates’ business communication needs. This investigation took place in multicultural organizations that employ business alumni from the American University of Sharjah in the UAE. In recent years, AUS has become a highly preferred destination for students from the Arabian Gulf, the Indian Subcontinent, Far East, Europe and Africa: a total of 85 nationalities. There are also 47 nationalities represented among the faculty, making AUS a truly multicultural university. This multicultural setting does not only promote cross-cultural interest among students, it also provides an authentic learning environment where our students experience cross-cultural communication challenges they will face in their workplaces.

The investigation revealed that respondents gained much of their communicative competence as a result of years of studying at a multicultural university campus. Although they might not have gained these skills from their textbooks in communication courses, they nevertheless became inter-culturally competent, and such competence is essential in today’s business organizations.

The presenter will demonstrate how faculty can make use of the possibilities that a multicultural campus environment offers to our students in order to enhance their intercultural communication abilities.

### **Keywords:**

intercultural communication, higher education, UAE