

Communication and Interculturality in Higher Education

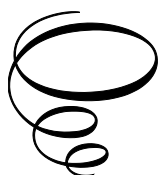
Communication and Interculturality in Higher Education:

Unveiling Contextual Barriers

Edited by

Sam Erevbenagie Usadolo
and Kunle Oparinde

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FOREWORD

My undergraduate sojourn at the University of Zimbabwe in the late 90s was hardly an intercultural experience. Saddled by a multi-dimensional crisis and a deteriorating economy, Zimbabwe had become a pariah destination for foreign students and academics seeking to 'ideate' outside the boundaries of their nation states. Thus, for my entire undergraduate studies, interculturality remained an imagined concept. My first quotidian experience of interculturality came during my postgraduate studies in South Africa where I was ushered into a mosaic of cultures and had to also teach an undergraduate module in intercultural communication. I had no option but to quickly navigate my way through, without any semblance of intercultural competence, in this new cultural 'heteroglossia'. The Alice campus of the University of Fort Hare was a metonym of the African continent. It was a citadel of the continent's diverse mosaic of languages, religions and cultures.

The 'meeting of nations' and 'clash of cultures' that I experienced as a fresh-faced student at the University of Fort Hare, is a metonym of the growing interconnectedness among countries as a result of globalisation and technological change. The 'explosion' of boundaries between nation states as a result of globalisation has precipitated unprecedented levels of student and staff mobility that is compelling Higher Education Institutions to forge strategic responses to 'Internationalisation'. Higher Education Institutions in the Global South can no longer afford to conduct business as usual in this increasingly fluid and volatile context. To remain competitive and relevant in the new context characterised by interculturality, Higher Education Institutions in the Global South need to urgently respond to global mobility by creating multicultural spaces for both students and staff to 'ideate'.

Usadolo and Oparinde's edited book is a refreshing and timely contribution to intensified debates on global mobility and its implications on Higher Education Institutions. Global in its orientation and drawing on the rich and diverse intercultural experiences from the Global South, the book provides

nuanced perspectives on the multi-dimensional challenges that global mobility and interculturality poses on Higher Education Institutions. The greatest strengths of this book are in my view threefold: It adds an empirical edge to discussions on intercultural communication that have largely been conceptual; it provides alternative decolonial and Afrocentric perspectives on intercultural communication; it also succeeds in theorising and conceptualising interculturality in ways that speak to the quotidian challenges of key stakeholders in the Higher Education sector: students, academics and policymakers.

This highly original book sets out to ask questions and proffer answers to some of the most pertinent questions that confront policy makers in Higher Education Institutions today. For example, Kunle Oparinde's chapter poses a thoughtful question on how Institutions of Higher Education should internationalise while simultaneously fostering interculturality? In a chapter that policy makers in the Higher Education sector will find gripping, Oparinde proposes an approach that views interculturality both as a societal construct and as part of a strategy geared towards producing students with graduate attributes that include intercultural competence.

As an African and an African scholar, issues of decolonising knowledge and epistemic erasure are of keen interest to my scholarship. This book responds to the call to decolonise our scholarly cannon on communication by providing a critical interjection on what it means to decolonise intercultural communication in Higher Education Institutions. Moola and Sibango's chapter proposes a disruptive but nuanced curriculum in intercultural communication that advances an inter-epistemological approach. The novel approach seeks to counter the hegemony of the Global North in discussions of intercultural communication. It advocates an alternative critical and Afrocentric approach that embraces colonial histories and inequalities.

Besides asking thoughtful questions about interculturality in Higher Education Institutions, this is also a book about experiencing. Rhoda Abiolu's chapter provides a rich and engaging autoethnographic account of her encounter with interculturality. Drawing on her experience as an international student in South Africa, Abiolu shares a graphic picture of the vicissitudes of adapting and integrating into a new country. What I found

quite incisive and novel in Abiolu's chapter, that will expand the frontiers of scholarship on intercultural communication, is an examination of the role of socio-cultural groupings and religious associations in overcoming barriers to interculturality. Usadolo and Oparinde's book also shares the quotidian experiences of students from the Global South whose voices are often missing in debates on interculturality. It interrogates the challenges experienced by students from sub-Saharan African students who enrol in Danish universities. The book utilises sub-Saharan students' experiences to pose critical questions about the challenges of integrating oneself in low context cultural contexts when one is hailing from high context cultures in the global South.

Academics and students of intercultural communication, especially in the Global South, will find this book extremely useful and resonant with their experiences. The book problematises dominant conceptualisations of interculturality and multiculturalism and goes further to discuss a myriad of ways for overcoming barriers to intercultural communication. Mdletye, Mgogo and Osunkunle's chapters unpack the different barriers of intercultural communication like ethnocentrism, stereotyping and prejudice that confront students and staff in Higher Education Institutions and how they can be overcome. Mgogo and Osunkunle's chapter in particular, adds original flavour to discussions on interculturality by borrowing a wide range of examples from the rich tapestry of African cultures to illustrate the different barriers encountered by students in Institutions of Higher Education in the Global South. Academics in general, will find Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide and Usadolo's study on the intercultural competence of theatre arts students at the University of Benin in Nigeria very provocative and enriching. This highly original study reflects on how learners navigate the unique mosaic of cultures that hamper intergration as well as knowledge and skills acquisition at university

This book is a must read for academics and students as well as policymakers in Higher Education institutions in the Global South.

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Dr Rhoda T.I. Abiolu is currently an NRF postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for General Education, Durban University of Technology (DUT). She earned her doctorate in 2020, from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), with a focus on Culture, Communication and Media Studies (CCMS). Her areas of interest are in media and cultural studies with an emphasis on media and cultural representations, ethnomusicology, participatory culture, African and diasporic studies, and communication in education, as well as education and curriculum development. Dr Abiolu draws attention to areas in which culture can be a force for societal development. Some of her published outputs are closely linked to areas of identity and participatory culture as well as ethnomusicology. Other projects are on COVID-19, education, curriculum development, and music as a fundamental ingredient for social cohesion. Her versatility, being interdisciplinary, and staying attuned to research trends are brought to the fore through her research outputs.

Alero Uwawah Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide is a current PhD student in Visual and Performing Arts at the Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa. She is a dramatist, playwright, director, researcher and lecturer. Her interest lies in theatre studies, focusing on theatre for development and theatre of the deaf for social change. She has authored articles in journals and books. Amongst her achievements are the proposal for “The virtual communities as space for Theatre for development” in 2011

which became visible in 2020 during the COVID-19 saga. She has over 10 publications, the most recent being: “The Tfd approach to the Niger Delta Crises: An examination of ‘The Pen’ as a Symbolic Tool of Deprivation” (2020) and “The Art of Storytelling: *Ita Ye* in focus” (2020). Her two plays, “The Hiatus” and “Usin...A metaphor of Twugaria” have been staged severally and are under review for publication.

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GLOBAL MOBILITY AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN DENMARK: THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Introduction

The present world has consistently witnessed growing trends and complexity in global mobility of all forms, moving from 173 million people in 2000 to 258 million people in 2017 (UNCTAD, 2018) and estimated to be about 272 million people globally in 2019 (IOM, 2020). Central within the global mobility spectrum is mobility for the purposes of higher education (HE). Evidence demonstrates that between 1963 and 2015 there was a nine-fold increase in the number of students in foreign countries. The general view is that the demand for cross-border education would increase to 7.2 million people by 2025 (Institute of International Education, 2018). The rising rate of global student mobility is now a policy agenda promoted by states and higher educational institutions (HEIs).

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Primarily, students cross borders to acquire new knowledge, broaden their horizons and pursue other objectives (Altbach, 2009; de Wit, 2013). Undeniably, such student movement across borders results in more revenue generation to the host nations, ensures the cross-fertilisation of intellectual research and knowledge and creates stronger brand names for the international institutions. Equally, nation states have their politico-diplomatic ties strengthened, fostering goodwill, improved GDP via the development of businesses and support services and an understanding of and familiarity with people of foreign backgrounds (Tiwari and Yeravdekar, 2014). Now, more than ever before, HEIs are hotbeds of multicultural contacts of all forms giving rise to intercultural interactions and cultural constructions.

Consequently, the contribution of international students and the positive prospects for national economies have made it the centre of reflection and interest to many studies (Leven, 2016; Douglas and Edelstein, 2009; Vicker and Bekhradnia, 2007; Campus France, 2016; Abdulai, 2018). Studies such as Abdulai (2018), Tiwari and Yeravdekar (2014), Piliste (2019) and Abdulai and Roosalu (2020) interrogated the intercultural issues in higher education (HE) but did not focus on the teaching and learning aspect, neglecting the forms of intercultural communication experiences that characterise the sojourn of students from the Global South in western universities. While some studies such as Piliste (2019) and Abdulai and Roosalu (2020) attempted to explore the varied experiences and perspectives that international students from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) bring to host universities in the west, they however, fell short of highlighting the intercultural communication experiences that students from SSA go through in western universities.

In a similar vein, Abdulai (2018) argues that research on global student mobility that is mainly focused on the economic benefits should be diversified to embrace issues that turn towards a deeper understanding of the effects of the intersection of local and foreign cultural variables that either foster or hinder intercultural integration, interactions, relationships and communications. Effective communication is a requirement for effective teaching and learning, research and interaction in HEIs. However, communicating within cultural diversity sometimes reduces the certainty

that gestures, and words carry the same meanings across the board. The potential for misunderstandings, misinterpretations, misinformation, doubts, and conflicts is heightened when people are communicating out of their comfort zones (Esber, 2007).

Interestingly, the increasing complexity of global student mobility is raising new issues and questions that are compelling enough to be left un-researched. One of the issues is that it has created the conditions where a single world educational space is formed. By so doing, students, researchers and professors are active participants on a variety of platforms to promote international exchange programmes, global scientific conferences and seminars, and other projects involving international cooperation (Kolosora and Poplavskaya, 2017). These are just additional platforms to on-campus teaching, learning, researching and socialising activities. In this trajectory, students from SSA are active participants on the globalised higher educational platform. They moved from countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, etc., to destinations in mainly Europe and Asia-Pacific which are wider apart in cultural distance. The question then is: How do international students from the Global South (SSA) experience communication with academic and non-academic staff and domestic students in host universities in Denmark?

In this regard, Denmark is a case study for research of this nature because it is an attractive study destination for an increasing number of international students. Also, higher educational learning opportunities are in limited supply in the Global South coupled with low employment opportunities while students are studying. This has led students from the Global South to look to countries like Denmark for these opportunities, resulting in an increasing reported number (1086) of students from SSA in the 2018/2019 academic year, which accounted for 2.5% of students in Danish universities (ICEF, 2019).

In the context of teaching and learning, messages are exchanged and meanings created in an intercultural context which cannot be isolated from the cultural and socio-psychological context of communication. For instance, meanings, communication and context are inextricably bound together (Hall, 2002) and communication is a dependable variable of culture

(Gallois et al. 2011). On this note, the Danes are found to be explicit in their communication and belong to the low-context cultural divide while people from the Global South exhibit high-context cultural variables (Abdulai, Ibrahim and Mohammed, 2017). Communication experiences under such a context where teaching and learning are traded will be intriguing and insightful to the creation of the dynamic learning environment. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to explore the communication experiences of students from the Global South in Danish universities – to understand their intercultural reality shaping their learning in higher institutions.

This study's structure will be as follows: a review of the relevant literature on global mobility and intercultural communication, followed by the theories underpinning the study and then the methodology of the study. The findings and discussion of the study will be presented, followed by a conclusion and reflections for future studies.

Global Mobility and Intercultural Communication

It cannot be denied that the number of international students pursuing HE outside of their countries is increasing by leaps and bounds, transforming the global HE landscape (Wells, 2014). King and Raghuram (2013) found viewing international students within a wider perspective of migratory strategies to be slippery since they were positioned between education and migration. But there is the need to position international students well as an essential component of highly skilled migrants owing to their growing importance (Brooks et al., 2012). Previously, international student mobility was the preserve and privilege of people from the middle and upper echelons of society, but it now includes the less privileged members of the different SSA societies. Currently, people from all walks of life within the post-colonial and post-socialist jurisdictions are active participants in international student mobility (Wilken and Dahlberg, 2017; Olwig and Valentin, 2014). They take to this expedition/adventure with the belief that investing in “western cultural capital” (Wilken and Dahlberg, 2017; Munk et al., 2012) will provide them with a unique educational quality in their home countries and the opportunity to integrate and be accepted into the labour markets in the west (Wilken and Dahlberg, 2017).

Travelling to Europe for a purpose other than education is highly restricted (Luthra and Platt, 2016) to the majority of people from SSA. This is making it possible for people from poor family backgrounds to go to Europe and work while studying (Vendrick, 2011; Olwig and Valentin, 2014). According to Wilken and Dahlberg (2017), studies on international students who may be caught within the intersection of education and work migrants are often students from the Global South “whose mobility is embedded in the student inequalities between the Global North and Global South” (Wilken and Dahlberg, 2017, p. 1349). The consequence of this is the growing intercultural contacts aside from those prevailing in the encounters in the environment of teaching, learning and researching of HEIs. It breeds complex intercultural situations since students from the Global South and Global North are orientated from two different cultural backgrounds.

Knight (2012) pointed out that the discourse on the current forms of international student mobility and on cultural diversity has constantly provoked powerful positions and sentiments. While some are of the positive view that it is promoting the fusion and hybridisation of cultures, others take a negative position that it is eroding national level identities of culture thereby engendering cultural homogeneity and westernisation. We subscribe to the middle position, termed the “double-sword” approach, that seeks to serve a cocktail of both the negative and positive perspectives in a way that provides valuable insights for improved and balanced research (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Rozkwitalska, 2017). This position has not been sufficiently studied with regards to the contemporary global mobility of students (Knight, 2012). Stack et al. (2019) view intercultural communication as a communication form that involves persons or groups from a variety of cultures. It suggests that two or more individuals who are from distinctive cultures engage in the process of communication with the view to achieving a specific goal. However, students studying in a different culture are confronted with issues of adapting to new situations of intercultural encounters. This includes adopting a new approach to handling intercultural communication in order to have a mutual understanding with their interlocutors (Kolosova and Poplavskaya, 2017).

With this growing cultural diversity, establishing and maintaining social relationships are more dependent on the capability to effectively and

competently communicate with people whose orientations and behaviours are at variance with others. The challenge, therefore, is to develop the needed communicative competencies to ensure effective participation in multicultural settings. More importantly, intercultural competence is especially significant to educators with the responsibility to prepare learners for a democratic life in multicultural contexts. For such intercultural competences to be realised, people need awareness concerning their personal assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes which are foundational to effective interactions and learning (Alhassan et al., 2020). The intercultural reality is that teachers and administrators at HE levels are witnessing the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of student populations. How these are shaping the contours of experiences of students from the global South has not been sufficiently examined in the literature. For instance, HEIs are avenues for developing intercultural competences with the conviction that people from diverse backgrounds are productive, creative and innovative (Hurtado, 2005). However, people's experiences about such a context involve incidences of miscommunication due to culturally bound interpretations (Abdulai et al., 2017) and "self-centred dialogues" (Guan, 1995) and this needs to be examined in detail.

The Concept of "Small Cultures" and the Integrative Theory of Intercultural Adaptation

"Small Culture" as a concept has been extensively looked at by scholars such as Holliday (1994b; 1997a; 1999) and Kullman et al. (2004) and it refers to any cohesive social grouping that is without any necessary subordination to large cultures. It is the contention of these scholars that small cultures have no essential relation to national, ethnic and international entities, but relate, however, to the way and manner that individual behavioural negotiations are constructed and discursively created in the midst of any orderly and organised social belongings or society. The "small culture" perspective thus tries to free the notion of culture from notions of nation and ethnicity and from the perceptually associated risks embedded in them (Holliday, 1999).

The motivation is to differentiate a small sense of culture from the way that intercultural issues are characterised in communication or linguistics

through the large culture approach. A large cultural difference is considered to be fundamental with great influence on cross-cultural discourse. This large cultural perspective has occasioned a “reductionist overgeneralization and otherization of ‘foreign’ educators, students and societies” (Holliday, 1999, p. 238). Importantly, a small culture presents a hands-on or heuristic way of interpreting small behaviours as manifested in the predicament of SSA students in Danish universities. In this context, the large culture is the Danish culture which comes in handy as host students, academic and non-academic staff with students from SSA constituting the “small culture”. Students from SSA defined herein as the “small culture” have intercultural interactions or communication in a way that is unique and self-focused and this needs to be studied in terms of its relationship with the large culture defined as the Danish host culture.

Instructively, this small culture of SSA students’ intercultural communication experience is relevant to the consideration of the integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2017). This theory presents a model to explain how and why individuals who upon relocating to a strange culture experience change, following the continuous experience of interactions with the new culture. This calls attention to the individual’s ability to communicate in consonance with the host’s cultural norms and practices which influences interpersonal communication activities. This is an instance of an adaptation process.

Kim (2001) indicates that cross-cultural adaptation is determined by two key components: the individual’s predisposition component and the environmental component. The communication factors in the process are explained as influencing and being influenced by the critical conditions in the host context (environmental component) and the person’s own ethnic predispositions (the individual’s predisposition component) (Kim, 2017). Student sojourners in this epoch of human mobility and cultural diffusion cannot escape the ubiquitous cultural intersections which may appear wearisome and atypical at times (Pitts, 2016). This cultural interchange (Pitts, 2016) has a positive result for intercultural personhood.

Intercultural personhood is considered as the psychic transformation that an individual goes through and the multiple communication experiences and the associated challenges in crossing over cultures. The end result of this transformation is meaningful as well as competent (effective) communication (Kim, 2008). International students in unfamiliar contexts certainly embark on communication efforts towards cross-cultural adaptation. Kim (2001) referred to the cross-cultural adaptation process as a dynamic unravelling of the individual's natural responses to the struggles towards achieving internal equilibrium in the midst of the usual adversarial conditions within the new environment.

Various actors are synchronising their actions in the communicative interface that comes between the individual and the host environment and the individual's ethnic and personal predispositions. In the realm of this current study, the capability of the foreign students from SSA to communicate effectively with the host country nationals (HCNs) in Europe will be dependent on the communicative receptivity of the HCNs. Also, Kim (2001) contends that the readiness of the individual foreign student for change can impact on the process of adaptation and integration in the host culture. Referencing that to this study, the predisposition of the student migrants from SSA studying in Europe may relate to their readiness to change as far as communication and general interactions are concerned, the extent of compatibility of their communicative culture and the host culture and their adaptive personality. It must be pointed out that Kim's theory of cultural adaptation is handicapped by ignoring the impact of other demographic variables such as gender, age and level of education on adaptation and integration (Wu, 2014). That notwithstanding, the theory remains relevant to our study as it will be applied to gauge how student migrants from SSA experience communication with host country nationals on campuses in Europe by reflecting on the structural conditions. Also, how the student migrants' personal characteristics are perceived as either barricades or facilitators for their adaptation and integration to the communicative environment in Danish universities.

Research Design and Method

The study is located in social constructionism which presupposes that we live in a world that is constructed by us which is not easily susceptible to change once constructed (Bryman, 2004; Kuada, 2012). As such, the issue of intercultural communication reality, be it with host constituents with SSA students or otherwise, is constructed by the participants in their host campuses and other contact points. The research design of this study is derived from ethnomethodology (EM) whose godfather (Garfinkel, 1967) posited that EM researchers “must scientifically investigate the world that includes” problematic phenomena and “not only the other person’s knowledge of the world and how they see it” (Delanty and Strydom, 2003, p. 97). By this, we can examine the categorisations of social actions of people in HEIs via counting on the communication and interaction experiences of SSA students that are directly devoid of the imposition of researchers’ values on the research setting (Lynch, 1993). It must then be established that students from SSA are co-conspirators to the incidences of the intercultural communications they experience as a social context. This is where the study made use of interviews as the main data collection tool through which it elicited responses from students of SSA backgrounds and the host students, representatives and administrators in Danish universities. Since ethnomethodology is data driven, the interview guide was formulated counting on the research problem and theoretical base to address the research problem (Bryman, 2004). In this regard, purposive sampling was applied since it affords the conscious selection of informants with the view to generating valuable and useful data for the study (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). As regards the inclusion and exclusion standards adopted, we enrolled SSA students, host students, representatives and administrators of their own free volition, who were prepared to volunteer their in-depth knowledge and experiences on communication and interactions across cultures in Danish universities (Aalborg University and Aarhus University). As a whole, there were twenty (20) participants consisting of nine (9) females and eleven (11) males in the age bracket of 20-50 years at the time of the data collection. Further characterisations of the participants are illustrated in the table below:

Table 1: Detailed Characteristics of Informants of the Study

| Place of fieldwork | Codes | Sex | First Language | Country of Origin | Field of programme | IoHE experience |
|--|----------|-----|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| FOREIGN STUDENTS FROM SSA COUNTRIES (N=7) | | | | | | |
| Denmark (N=7) | SSA-DK14 | F | Nyamambo | Cameroon | Tourism | 2-5 years of studying in the host country |
| | SSA-DK15 | M | Swahili | Tanzania | International Business | |
| | SSA-DK8 | M | Amharic | Ethiopia | Environmental Management | |
| | SSA-DK12 | M | Yoruba | Nigeria | Geographical Information System | |
| | SSA-DK9 | F | Hausa | Nigeria | ICT | |
| | SSA-DK3 | M | Dagbani | Ghana | | |
| | SSA-DK7 | M | Twi | Ghana | | |
| LOCAL STUDENTS (N=4) | | | | | | |
| Denmark (N=4) | ST-DK19 | M | Danish | Denmark | Cultural Studies | 2-5 years of studying with students from SSA |
| | ST-DK4 | M | | | Business | |
| | ST-DK16 | F | | | Social Sciences | |
| | ST-DK11 | M | | | | |

| HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION REPRESENTATIVES (N=9) | | | | | | |
|--|----------|---|--------|---------|------------------------------|---|
| Denmark (N=9) | HEI-DK20 | M | Danish | Denmark | Lecturer in Education | 10-16 years of working in HEI with SSA students |
| | HEI-DK5 | F | | | Lecturers in Social Sciences | |
| | HEI-DK1 | F | | | Lecturer in Languages | |
| | HEI-DK10 | F | | | Lecturer in ICT | |
| | HEI-DK6 | M | | | Administrator | |
| | HEI-DK23 | F | | | Administrator | |
| | HEI-DK13 | M | | | | |
| | HEI-DK21 | F | | | | |
| | HEI-DK2 | F | | | | |

Source: Authors' own description

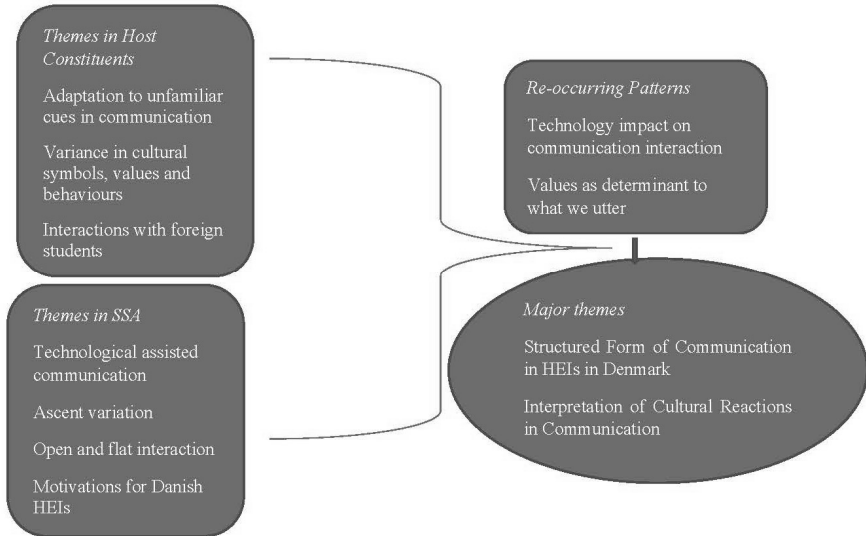
HEI indicates a higher education institution representative (academic as well as non-academic), **ST** indicates a local student, **DK** indicates Denmark with the respondent's serial/coded number and **SSA** indicates a student from South Saharan Africa.

The questions asked during the in-depth interviews were open-ended which allowed us to ask more probing questions as a follow up to the already answered ones. Some of the questions posed were principally centred on how international students from the Global South experience communication with academic and non-academic staff and domestic students in Danish universities. Essentially, other questions were aimed at exploring responses relating to the cultural construction of intercultural communication reality, and the significance of social context as to how communication in a different culture is constructed, re-constructed and deconstructed. These interviews, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim, lasted from one hour to one hour and thirty minutes maximum. The interviews took place from March 2019 to May 2019 in Denmark.

The data transformation process was kick-started by the importation of the interviews to the NVIVO 12 software in which summaries were generated for each of the interviews utilising the memo function. To remain connected to the data and avoid the imposition of predefined ideas that would have culminated in pre-mature intellectualisation (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 47), memo passages had to be linked to the interview section using the function of cross-reference. Through the cross-reference mechanism, we were able to move between our conceptions of intercultural communication experiences, having experienced the situation and same context ourselves and experiences of the informants of the phenomenon in question. For the purposes of pattern emergence, coding the data was supported by the theoretical thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Adopting the theoretical thematic analysis highlights the salient parts of the narratives of the informants by casting a light on critical aspects to reflect on their experiences pertaining to communication in HEIs in Denmark. The theory driven deductive approach was applied to sort out themes in the data. Also, it must be noted that the coding of the data was guided by theoretical and epistemological alignments on the experiences of the intercultural communication reality as experienced by the informants. The theme-based coding scheme was applied to generate a preliminary list of codes from the informants. We put the codes into potential themes and gathered thematic maps and the phrases frequently appearing were generated, refined, merged and compared and the most frequent frames were generated which

constituted the major themes for the discussion as highlighted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Themes' Generation Processes



Source: Authors' own design

Findings and Discussion

This part of the study illustrates the findings and discussion, characterised under two main themes: the structured form of communication in HEIs in Denmark and interpretation of the cultural reactions in communication.

Structured Form of Communication in HEIs in Denmark

Effective communication is a critical feature in communication scenarios where encoders and decoders are coming from different cultural backgrounds. The possibility of miscommunication, misunderstanding and misinterpretation is high under such scenarios and for that matter, many measures have been created by some organisations including technology assisted means to guarantee faster, effective and competent intercultural communication. It

must be mentioned that these technology assisted communications are not common across all cultures uniformly. Some jurisdictions, for whatever reason, are not sufficiently privileged to deploy such mechanisms to improve their communication processes. For this reason, it emerged as part of the central intercultural communication experiences of students from SSA when they found out that an essential part of communication with lecturers and other host constituents was done via emails. This is how an SSA student articulated his communication experience with his lecturer/supervisor:

In terms of communication, it's been good but mostly and strangely by email; my supervisor answers my mails promptly and I communicate with him via mail anytime the need be and he is always ready to respond. The other side is because of the arrangement, you communicate with the supervisor, your programme director, the secretary, and they are always all around to assist in so far as the problem relates to my study. (SSA-DK 7)

It can be deciphered from the statement above that this form of communication is highly formalised and seems to be the most preferred or used one by the respondent's supervisor, though it appeared to be strange. Communicating via emails under this circumstance of intercultural reality is done in the virtual context facilitated by a technological medium (internet) as noted by Uzun (2014). The respondent is able to transcend that because he has the competence and inclination or adaptive personality to change and follow this communicative trend that he hardly uses when communicating with his/her supervisor in their culture of orientation. Such communication can also be a precursor to face-to-face meetings in cultures whose communication structure is highly formalised unlike those with no advance planning-cum-time schedule. SSA students are used to meeting with their supervisors without prior time schedules. It makes more sense as Northern Europeans are noted to be very sensitive when it comes to protecting their personal space from being invaded as they engage in less direct physical contact (Spering, 2001). Communicating frequently via email guarantees them a personal space that is safe from privacy invasion.

The time designated for communication or discussion varies significantly among people based on their cultural orientations. For this particular reason, some cultures structure their tasks including communication meetings

according to certain times and as such do not meet and communicate with people haphazardly. It was also found that among the forms of intercultural communication experiences of SSA students, one has to make prior arrangements to have discussions with lecturers and non-academic staff. This is how this idea found expression in the responses of a respondent:

I think, they may have reinforced something, which is about time, I am not that time conscious, but coming here, I observed that, the students and lecturers respect time so much, and you need to book an appointment in order to have discussion with someone, and you have to honour that or you have to give an excuse. So, I think, they have reinforced that dimension of the issue of time in my life and I take that quite seriously. (SSA-DK 9)

From the foregoing, the respondent espoused how careless he is about time, but on the contrary, the new cultural context holds time in high esteem. There is some understanding that Danish culture is both monochronic and low context. Monochronic cultures regard time as a linear process and assignments are charted sequentially, one thing at a time (Hall, 1976). Time is precious and compartmentalised among tasks, personal and social dimensions and schemes towards future activities and events (Alhassan et al., 2020) whereas low-context cultures communicate explicitly and require more information as well as follow rules of privacy and consideration (Duranti and Di Prata, 2009). In this regard, the HCNs will comfortably meet with you when there is an arrangement that permits such a meeting. Conversely, the SSA cultures are congruent with a polychronic and high-context cultural schism which views time as a fluid phenomenon where events flow with time and with loose time schedules and interruptions which are regarded as normal. High-context cultures prefer oral communication in an implicit manner and tend to belabour the same point in a variety of ways (Alhassan et al., 2020). In order to interact well, the students from SSA had to demonstrate a tendency towards booking appointments before meeting with the HCNs as well as being time conscious. Nevertheless, by the high-context orientation, the SSA students espoused a belief that such prior arrangements limit interaction. This is vividly expressed in the transcript below:

Yes, it limits the interaction, everything must be pre-arranged in a very structured manner, so you have a structured society and so you have to

structure your behaviour. Even when you meet at a place and you don't know others, sometimes you don't know how to start interacting with them. So, all those things limit interaction. (SSA-DK 14)

The respondent cast light on the predicament that pre-arranged meetings is a limitation to interaction. He alluded to the fact that the society has a structure which requires a predisposition to structured behaviour. The consequence of that further makes one disorientated as to how to initiate an interaction with people of the host culture. This is understandable in that interrogating the low-context versus high-context cultures reveals that high-context cultures draw much meaning implicitly from unspoken information during communication and tend to place significant importance on long lasting relationships and loyalty with less regard for the rules and structures of communication. However, low-context cultures exchange much information explicitly through the message itself and hardly draw any information via hidden gestures and unnecessary inferences. They tend to be brief and straightforward with words and relationships and strictly follow rules and standards and are overly task-oriented.

Furthermore, it is also related, among the forms of intercultural communication experience, that lectures are often interlaced with 15-minute breaks and students working in groups as other prominent features in Danish HEIs. This is how it is described by one of the respondents:

Then, there was that issue of you having a lecture to some point, you break for some time and have 15-minute breaks which you can come and continue, I never experienced that in Ghana. Then, aside from that, there was the student group, group learning where you have to form a group, then after each thing, you have to come to form a group, create a topic and write a project on a semester topic, then afterwards, you write as a group but you go individually and defend it and you could even get different grades for the same topic that you have presented, it doesn't mean that, you as a group, you will get the same grade. (SSA-DK 12)

From the quote above, lectures are planned with 15-minute breaks to allow students to relieve themselves before continuing. The lecture duration is considered as a risk factor that determines the quality of teaching and learning in HE since it has a direct bearing on attention, performance and memory (Eze and Edward, 2017). Breaks in lectures diminish stress,

improve productivity and uplift proper brain function as brains do not idle during such breaks but are active at processing memories. Those times are sense making moments and a resetting of focus of learners and teachers (Terada, 2018). This strategy of punctuating lectures with short breaks for the aforementioned purposes and for socialising is characteristic of HEIs in Denmark but it did not go down well with the students from SSA. The respondent said that he has never experienced that in his home Ghanaian culture. Also embedded in the transcript above is the notion of students' group work.

Competence in intercultural interaction has emerged as a necessity for proper and effective functioning in this growing globalised and multicultural world. Therefore, working or studying in groups is identified as a means by which students can engage and interact with each other to develop academic and intercultural competence. This is so because knowledge is rigorously constructed via interactions with each other instead of receiving information alone (Liu and Dall'Alba, 2012). Upon learning vital intercultural skills at the group level, group members stand the chance of replicating those behaviours beyond the group level to the larger society. That explains the rippling effect as group members interact with the large communities and this creates a broader pathway for entrenching effective and positive intercultural interactions as well as social justice (Okech et al., 2015). For this purpose, most HEIs in Denmark have student group work as an important component of their teaching and learning process. But this appears to be something outside of the ordinary for the SSA students, much more so when after working in a group you get individual grades for the same group work. Danish cultures are individualistic on the Hofstede (1997) dimensions and so highlight the individual efforts and performance. This might explain the reason for grading students individually within a group contrary to the anticipation of group grading from SSA students who are orientated from collectivist societies.

Interpretation of Cultural Reactions to Communication

To survive in this current globalising working environment, one will need not only technical skills, but also the ability to communicate and interact across different groups of people who share different values, beliefs, norms,

and worldviews. Hence, skills and techniques of interpretation of cultural reactions in communication are prerequisites to functioning effectively in local and international contexts. To this end, some of the participants were asked to describe the influence of culture on their interaction with members of the host university and this was how one participant narrated his story:

Well, I really try to break cultural gaps because I want to meet every interactional partner just as an individual and judge the person within the interactional context. Eeh... I didn't want to be biased in how I see people.
(HEI-DK15)

The statements in the extract above highlighted the willingness of the participant to respond and interact appropriately across cultures. In this regard, the participant was sensitive and non-judgemental about the host society's culture. This understanding resonates with the postulation of Ting-Toomey (1999) that mindfulness means being aware of our own and others' behaviour in a situation and paying attention to the process of communication taking place between us and dissimilar others. Besides, the ability of the participant to break cultural gaps in the new environment could be an enabler for his integration into the multiple cultures in the new learning environment. Moreover, the participant had prepared his mind for new perspectives and could transcend from being ethnocentric to ethnorelative (Holliday, 1999). The opportunity for individuals to adapt to a new environment largely depends on their personal characteristics, and the host culture's receptivity (Kim, 2001). For instance, knowing and valuing one's culture and having the same disposition towards other cultures are necessary and sufficient conditions for effective intercultural engagements (Stack et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important for individual migrants to have a good understanding of the cultural environment of the host countries, and its dynamics so as to communicate effectively across cultures. Inherently, inadequate understanding of these cultural dynamics may result in miscommunication.

Effective cross-cultural communication skills and knowledge are necessary requirements to relate effectively with students, lecturers and administrators characterised by different values, beliefs, and norms. In view of this, when a question was posed to the participants on the influence of culture on