

# Assessing the Factors That Affect Students' Interpersonal Communication from Diversified Cultural Backgrounds: The Case of English Language and Literature Major Students in Debre Tabor University

Endeshaw Alemu Semegn

**ABSTRACT:** *The main purpose of this study was assessing the factors that affect students' interpersonal communication from Diversified Cultural Backgrounds: the case of English Language and Literature Major Students in Debre Tabor University. 70 students were the participant of the study. To conduct the study comprehensive and random sampling techniques were used to select the participants for questionnaire, and interview respectively. 16 questionnaires were distributed to gather quantitative and qualitative data. 6 students were interviewed to get qualitative data. The data that were gathered through close-ended questions have been analyzed quantitatively by using percentage and tables. The data that were gathered through open-ended questions and interview were analyzed through qualitative method. The finding of the study indicates that interpersonal communication among Debre Tabor University students who came from different cultural backgrounds are highly affected by language and cultural diversity. The study shows that there is a communication breakdown among students who came from different cultural and language backgrounds. Factors like, lack of practice, lack of experience, language difference, lack of designed programs, cultural difference, prejudice, Ethnocentrism, are the major barriers which affected students' interpersonal communication. The study thus suggests that promoting the student's awareness on interpersonal communication should be prioritized in the university.*

## I. Introduction

### 1.1 background of the study

Many scholars have written about culture. "Culture is the behaviors, patterns, symbols, institution, values, and other human made components of the society" Banks (2012). According to Taylor (1871). "Culture is defined as a social domain that emphasizes the practice, discourses, and material expressions which is used to express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of life held in common". "It is learned and passed from one generation to another generation via the process of cultural background. And it is the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society". It is true that universities are important place of diversified culture; norms, customs, Law's and languages, and students of Debre Tabor University have this diversity because they come from different cultural backgrounds.

According to Nodoushan (2006) "The relationship between communication and culture is very complex and intimate one. It is so much that individuals set out to create a culture when they interact in relationship, groups, organization or societies. And also, culture is created, shaped, transmitted and learned through communication".

It is true that communication shapes our view of reality and our cultural patterns. Some scholars argue that our reality is determined by our communication, and also culturally influenced difference in language and meaning can lead to some interesting encounters ranging from awkward to informative disastrous.

“Intercultural communication defined as situated communication between individuals or groups of different linguistic and cultural origins” (Barns.L.M, 1997), again intercultural communication is a discipline that studies communication across different cultures and social groups or how culture affects communication. It is true that Universities are important place of diversified cultures, norms, and languages. In this study, the researchers tried to show the factors of interpersonal communication like, language difference, the influence of culture, prejudice, ethnocentrism, past life experience, lack of designed programs are the major factors that affect students’ interpersonal communication focusing on English language and literature major students’ in Debre Tabor University.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

##### **1.4.1 General objective**

The general objective of this study is to assess the factors that affect students’ interpersonal communication from diversified cultural backgrounds: the cease of English language and literature major students in Debre Tabor University. This general objective of the study specifically focuses on:

1. To identify the major factors that affects the students’ interpersonal communication in Debre Tabor University.
2. To assess the extent of interpersonal communication break downs among English language and literature major students of Debre Tabor University.
3. To evaluate the effects of language and cultural differences on interpersonal communication among English language and literature major students in Debre Tabor University.

## **II. Research Design and Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Design**

The researcher has used both qualitative and quantitative research methods of study. Qualitative data basically involves in word expression and to gather non-numerical information; on the other hand, quantitative research design use in numerical data like, table, percentage, and frequency. And also, both qualitative and quantitative methods enabled to gather important or adequate information from the respondents.

### **2.2. Target population of the study**

The subjects of this study are first, second and third year English language and Literature Major Students of Debre Tabor University.

### **2.3. Sample size and sampling techniques**

There are 70 students in English language and Literature department of Debre Tabor University in 2010 E.C. From the total of 70 students, the researchers took the whole 70 students in the sample. The researcher used comprehensive sampling techniques to conduct a study on a small number of populations.

### **2.4. Source of Data**

The researcher gathered relevant data using primary sources. The primary sources of data are all batches of English language and Literature major students.

## 2.5. Data gathering tools

The researcher prepared appropriate data gathering tools to conduct the study effectively; questionnaire and interview. So, the researcher had prepared questionnaire and distributed for the students to gather information about the factors of interpersonal communication. The researcher also prepared interview for the students to get additional information about the factors of interpersonal communication.

### 2.5.1. Questionnaire

The researcher used questionnaires as first tools of data collection for this research. The researcher prepared both close-ended and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions prepared for the purpose of gaining detail information and close-ended questions prepared to get short and brief information from the respondents.

### 2.5.2. Interview

Next to questionnaire, the researcher gathered relevant data through interviewing students. So, the researcher selected two students randomly from each class of English language and Literature major students for interview. The researcher prepared the same interview questions in to the same order for the students who learn in English language and Literature department.

## 2.6. Methods of Data Analysis Interpretation

The researcher gathered the data through open-ended questions, close-ended questions and interviews. Open-ended questions and interviews are analyzed and interpreted qualitatively using descriptive statements. And the data gathered through close-ended questions analyzed quantitatively using percentage and number.

## III. Data Analysis and Interpretation

### 3.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present data description and findings which were gathered through questionnaires and interviews on: The factors that affect students' interpersonal communication from Diversified Cultural Backgrounds.

### 3.2. Analysis on students' close-ended questions.

Table 1: the effect of interpersonal communication

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Which one of the following do you think affects yo	Lack of practice	19	27.1 %
		Lack of experience	11	15.7 %
		Language interference	40	57.2 %
		T o t a l	70	100 %

As indicated in table (1) above, 19(27.1%) of the respondents answered that lack of practice affects their interpersonal communication; However, the majority of the respondents 40(57.2%) responded that language interface has influenced their interpersonal communication only 11(15.7%) of the respondents answered that of lack of experience affects their interpersonal communication. From the above data, we can conclude that

language interference and lack of practice highly influenced their interpersonal communication. As the above analysis shows,

Language interference created great difficulties on the effectiveness of their interpersonal communication.

Table 2: frequency of English language usage in the students' interpersonal communication

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	P e r c e n t a g e	
2	How often do you use English in your interpersonal communication?	S o m e t i m e s	4	4	6 2 . 8 %
		R a r e l y	1	0	1 4 . 3 %
		A l w a y s	4		5 . 7 %
		N e v e r	1	2	1 7 . 2 %
		T o t a l	7	0	1 0 0 %

As shown from the above table(2), the greatest number of the respondents, 44(62.8%)of the students answered that they sometimes use English in their interpersonal communication; on the other hand, 10(14.3%)of the students responded that they rarely use English in their interpersonal communication, and also 4(5.7%)of the students answered that they always use English in their interpersonal communication, but the remaining 12(17.2%)of the respondents replied that they never use English in their interpersonal communication. From the above table, the researchers conclude that most students sometimes use English in their interpersonal communication.

Table 3: The role of culture in interpersonal communication

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage	
3	To what extent do you think culture affects your inter	To great extent	4	0	5 7 . 1 %
		To some extent	2	0	2 8 . 6 %
		To a very limited extent	8		1 1 . 4 %
		It is not a barrier at all	2		2 . 9 %
		T o t a l	7	0	1 0 0 %

As it is shown in table (3), the majority of the respondents 40(57.1%) answered that culture affects their interpersonal communication in a great extent; However, 20(28.6%) of the respondents answered that culture affects their interpersonal communication to some extent. And 8(11.4%) of the respondents said that culture affects their interpersonal communication to a limit extent. Only 2(2.9%) of the respondents said that culture does not affect their interpersonal communication at all. From the above data analysis the researchers conclude that culture has highly influenced their interpersonal communication.

Table 4: The effect of cultural background an interpersonal communication

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	P e r c e n t a g e
4	Does your cultural background affect your inte	Y e s	61	87.7 %
		N o	9	12.9 %
		T o t a l	70	100 %

Table, (4) indicates that most of the respondents, 61(87.1%) said that cultural background affects their interpersonal communication, but only 9(12.9%) of the respondents approved that cultural background does not affect their interpersonal communication at all. From the above data analysis, the researchers conclude that cultural background affects the students' interpersonal communication.

Table 5: The role of language difference in interpersonal communication

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage
5	To what extent do you think language dif	To great extent	45	64.3 %
		To some extent	18	25.7 %
		To every limit extent	7	10 %
		It is not a barrier at all	0	0 %
		T o t a l	70	100 %

As it shown in table (5), the majority of the respondents 45(64.3%) answered that language difference affects their interpersonal communication to a great extent. Whereas, 18(25.7%) of the respondents responded that language difference affects their interpersonal communication to some extent. Only 7 (10%)of the respondents answered that language difference affects their interpersonal communication to a limit extent. And 0 (0%) of the respondents answered that language difference does not affect their interpersonal communication at all. From the above data analysis the researchers conclude that language difference has highly influenced (affects) their interpersonal communication at all.

Table 6: Respondents on communication course

N O	I t e m	Response	No of respondents	P e r c e n t a g e
6	Have you taken any communication course?	Y e s	60	85.7 %
		N o	10	14.3 %
		T o t a l	70	100 %

The above table (6) shows that 60(85.7%) of the respondents have taken a communication course which means that most of the students have awareness about communication. However, 10(14.3%) of the respondents have not taken any communication courses which means they do not have awareness about communication, so they have a negative effect on their interpersonal communication.

Table 7: the effect of language difference on interpersonal communication

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage
7	Does language difference affect your interpersonal communication?	Y e s	67	95.7 %
		N o	3	4.3 %
		T o t a l	70	100 %

The above table shows that, 67(95.7%) of the respondents said that mother tongue language difference affects their interpersonal communication, but 3(4.3%) of the respondents answered that language difference do not affect their interpersonal communication. According to the data analysis shown from the above table, the researchers concluded that language difference affects the student's interpersonal communication.

Table 8: Students on interpersonal communication

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage
8	Are you familiarized with interpersonal communication?	Y e s	35	50 %
		N o	35	50 %
		T o t a l	70	100 %

As the analysis from the above table (8) indicates, 35(50%) of the respondents answered that they familiarized with interpersonal communication which means half of the students have awareness about interpersonal communication, but 35(50%) of the respondents answered that they are not familiarized with interpersonal communication that means half of the students do not have awareness about interpersonal communication.

Table 9: communication practice in the classroom

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage
9	How often do you practice interpersonal communication in the classroom?	S o m e t i m e s	37	52.9 %
		A l w a y s	11	15.7 %
		R a r e l y	3	4.3 %
		N e v e r	9	12.9 %
		T o t a l	70	100 %

As stated in the above table, 37(52.9%) of the respondents responded that they sometimes practice their interpersonal communication in the classroom. Whereas, 11(15.7%) of the respondents answered that they always practice interpersonal communication in the classroom. On the other hand, 13(18.5%) of the respondents responded that they rarely practice interpersonal communication in the classroom. Beside to this, 9(12.9%) of the respondents answered that they never practice interpersonal communication in the classroom. According to the respondent's response, the researchers concluded that most of students sometimes practice their interpersonal communication in the classroom.

Table 10: the improvement of program on interpersonal communication

N O	I t e m	Response	No of respondents	Percentage
1 0	Is there any program which is designed to improve your interpersonal communication	Y e s	2 0	2 8 . 6 %
		N o	5 0	7 1 . 4 %
		T o t a l	7 0	1 0 0 %

As shown from table 10, 20(28.6%) of the respondents said that there is a program which is designed to improve students interpersonal communication. This means they have awareness about interpersonal communication. But 50(71.4%) of the respondents answered that there is no any program designed to improve students interpersonal communication. from the above data analysis, the researchers concluded that there is no any program which is used to practice their interpersonal communication freely.

Table 11: Communication interaction among students from different cultural background

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage
1 1	How do you interact with students who have different cultural backgrounds	P o s i t i v e l y	2 0	2 8 . 6 %
		N e g a t i v e l y	3 4	4 8 . 6 %
		N e u t r a l	1 6	2 2 . 8 %
		T o t a l	7 0	1 0 0 %

As indicated in table (11) above, 20(28.6%) of the respondents answered that they have a positive interaction with students from different cultural back grounds. However, the majority of the respondents, 34(48.6%) responded that they have a negative interaction with students from different cultural back grounds. Whereas the other respondents 16(22.8%) answered that they have neutral interaction with students who have different cultural backgrounds. From the above data analysis, the researcher concludes cultural background affects the students' interaction with different cultural backgrounds.

Table 12: Communication experience

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage
1 2	How often do you communicate with students from different cultural backgrounds?	A l w a y s	5	7 . 1 %
		S o m e t i m e s	4 1	5 8 . 6 %
		N e v e r	1 0	1 4 . 3 %
		R a r e l y	1 4	2 0 %
		T o t a l	7 0	1 0 0 %

As indicated from table 12 above, 5(7.1%) of the respondents said that they always communicate with students from different cultural backgrounds. However, the majority of the respondents 41(58.6%) answered that they sometimes communicate with the students from different cultural backgrounds. The other 10(14.3%) of the respondents said that they never communicate at all with students from different cultural backgrounds. Whereas, 14(20%) of the respondents responded that they rarely communicate with students from different cultural backgrounds. According to the analyzed data, communication experience is the factor that affects the students' interpersonal communication.

Table 13: Perception of facial expression

N O	I t e m	R e s p o n s e	No of respondents	Percentage
1 3	When communicate face to face with students, do you use facial expression as a means of communication?	H i g h l y	16	2 2 . 9 %
		T o s o m e e x t e n t	4 5	6 4 . 3 %
		N o t a t a l l	9	1 2 . 9 %
		T o t a l	7 0	1 0 0 %

As indicated in table 13 above, (22.9%) of the respondents said that they use facial expression as a means of communication. However, the majority of the respondents 45(64.3%) answered that they use facial expression to some extent. Only 9(12.9%) said that they do not use facial expression as a means of communication. According to the data analysis, some students do not use facial expression as a means of communication in their face to face communication.

#### 4.3 Analysis of open-ended question

- ✓ What are the contributions of communication course you have taken in solving your interpersonal problems?  
Among 70 respondents 30(42.8%) of them answered that the contribution of the communication courses are, to develop confidence, to get new knowledge, to communicate each other and used to solve problems simply. It is also important to develop speech abilities; to express ideas, feeling, emotions, attitudes, and used to keep the language breakdowns and vocabularies.



The other 3(4.3%) respondents from 70 sample respondents responded that communication courses have used to communicate with friends, teachers, and classmates. They also said that the courses of spoken English one and two have played a great role on the students' interpersonal communication. Those courses are used to show how to use the syllable in communication, and also it gives awareness how to pronounce the words. In addition to this the course of communicative is used to solve the interference of interpersonal communication and used to show how students interact with the society. And in addition to this, 5(7.4%) respondents among 70 sample respondents answered that communication course contribute a lot in reducing communication problems and it serves as a guideline when the students communicate in the classroom and outside of classroom. It also helps to develop interpersonal communication with classmates, and used to improve the experience of thoughts, feeling and ideas during communicate with friends. Generally this communication courses have contribute a lot for students to develop a good personal relationship and awareness of interpersonal relationship that comes from different language and cultural diversity.

✓ Could you list factors that affect students' interpersonal communication?

Among 70 sample respondents 39(55.7%) respondents answered that, lack of confidence, lack of interest, lack of ability to speak others language, past life experience, and the influence of culture and language differences are the main factors that affect students' interpersonal communication. In addition to this, 17(24.3) respondents responded that, prejudice, Ethnocentrism and negative attitude for other language speakers, and also difference in perception and viewpoint, lack of attention are some common factors that affects students interpersonal communication.

#### **4.4 Analysis of students Interview**

The researcher developed 3 interview questions for six sample respondents to gather information regarding the factors that affect students' interpersonal communication from diversified cultural backgrounds. The students' interview are analyzed and discussed below.

✓ Have students developed a good personal relationship with any one from different cultural backgrounds?

Students who were interviewed almost gave the same responses. According to the interview some students partially have personal relationship with students who come from different cultural backgrounds .However, most students do not have good relationship with students who come from different cultural backgrounds, because most students have their own norms, values, cultures, traditions and language, so each students affected by such things due to this reason; they cannot develop good personal relationship with each other. In addition to this most students do not have interest to learn others culture and language and they have a feeling of Ethnocentrism, due to this reason, they do not have good personal relationship. Normally students do not have good relationship with most students who come from different cultural backgrounds.

✓ Are you happy living in dormitory with students of different cultural backgrounds?

Among 6 interviewee 2(33.3%) of them are happy living in dormitory with students of different cultural backgrounds in order to learn different cultures languages and learning styles from different students who come from different parts of the country. But from the sample interview, 4(66.7%) of them answered that they are not interested in living dormitory with students from different cultural backgrounds. They have different awareness about culture and they have not smooth relationship with students from different cultural backgrounds, and most students does not have the concepts of equal treatment of all cultures, norms, values and languages, so most students are not happy living in dormitory with students of different cultural backgrounds.

✓ How often do students make practice their interpersonal communication during doing assignment or group discussion in your classroom?

among the 6 interviewee 1(16.7%) of them responded that, most students sometimes practicing their interpersonal communication sometimes during group discussion in order to share experiences and cultural manifestation, However; 5(83.3%) of them responded that most of the students never practice interpersonal

communication during group discussion and they give less attention for practice of their interpersonal communication during doing assignment or group discussion.

### **3.5 Discussion**

The result of the questionnaire and interview indicated that there are factors that affect student's interpersonal communication like, lack of confidence, lack of interest, past life experiences, prejudice, Ethnocentrism, negative attitude for other- language speakers, and the influence of culture. Smith, 2012 suggested that, interpersonal communication barriers relate to the factors that are personal to the sender and receiver act as hindrance in communication. These factors include the life experiences, emotions, attitudes, lack of confidence, previous bad experience, behaviors that hinders the ability of a person to communicate are the key factors in interpersonal communication.

As the result of questionnaire and interview shows that students of Debre Tabor University fail to communicate each other. And most students do not have good relationship with students who came from different cultural backgrounds, because they are influenced by their own norms, values, cultures, traditions and mother tongue language, so they failed to communicate each other. Brent (2018) supported that cultural factors includes language, belief system; morality, perspective, customs, and traditions are presents potential barriers in communication that influences the effectiveness of how we interact with each other or within a group of people.

The result of questionnaire and interview indicated that language differences and culture differences breaks the students' interpersonal communication in a great extent. Dileky, k (2017) suggested that the inability to converse in a language between the sender and receiver is a great barrier in effective communication. He stated that when a person uses inappropriate words while conversing or writing, it could lead to misunderstanding between the sender and the receiver

## **IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **4.1 CONCLUSION**

This study focus on: assessing the factors that affect students' interpersonal communication from diversified cultural backgrounds. The researcher took all batches of English Language and Literature Major Students. Based on the finding of the data, the following conclusions were drawn.

The finding implied that, there are some factors that affect students' interpersonal communication. Those are lack of interest, frustration, past life experience; lack of confidence, negative attitude about others language; lack of designed program, lack of practice; lack of attention, different perception and view point, and language differences.

As the finding demonstrated that, culture difference and language difference also affects the face to face communication that takes place among Debra Tabor university English language and Literature Major Students.

As the finding shows, most students do not have smooth interaction with those who come from different cultural backgrounds because of there are factors that affect students' interaction. Those are language differences, belief system, ethnic difference; variation of tradition, customs, norm; value, negative attitude; prejudices, Ethnocentrism are the major barriers of interpersonal communication. In general, the finding of the study shows students from different language, cultural, and ethnic groups interact less and their interpersonal communication is very less.

## 5.2 Recommendation

Many factors were identified in the data analyzed of the study. So, it needs some solution to overcome the problems and improve the ability of interpersonal communication in Debre Tabor University. Based on the findings, the researcher would like to recommend students, instructors, Departments and ministry of education.

- ✓ All students should pay high attention for interpersonal communication, and also should always practice in the classroom and outside the classroom.
- ✓ The students' cultural diversity and language variation need to be properly addressed in the university to enhance interpersonal communication among students from different cultural and language backgrounds.
- ✓ The students should try to use English language as a medium of interaction when they communicate with each other.
- ✓ Students should be interested to communicate each other in interpersonal communication with the students who come from different cultural background.
- ✓ The students should develop smooth relationship in their interpersonal communication.
- ✓ Every student should improve his/her personal contact with those students who come from other ethnic groups for better interpersonal communication and to establish good interpersonal relationship
- ✓ Students should have positive attitude towards interpersonal communication and they should rearrange their mind and work hard to build positive outlook.
- ✓ Instructors also must encourage and guide students to improve their interpersonal communication skill.
- ✓ English Department should prepare training program for English language and Literature students.
- ✓ English Department should create awareness to strength student's interpersonal communication and learn with their interests.
- ✓ The university should organize various conferences such as, sport festival, artistic activities, and experience sharing, to develop social and cultural interaction among students.
- ✓ Ministry of education should give priority for English learners because English has become more dominant around the world as the medium of instruction to solve the factors of interpersonal communication

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