EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS: 
A CASE STUDY OF GHANAIAN AND NIGERIAN STUDENTS 
IN FINLAND

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ABSTRACT

International Education has gained prominence the world over. Many students migrate to different parts of the world in pursuit of further education. This phenomenon comes with its own benefits and challenges. Many tertiary institutions are now promoting “internationalization”, diversity and multiculturalism, therefore encouraging qualified international students to apply for admission into these institutions. This notwithstanding, the international students come with their own beliefs and perceptions. They initially encounter problems in their attempt to settle in the host country. This research examined intercultural relations/communication problems and challenges that international students in Finland specifically in the University of Eastern Finland faced and how they overcame them. Using thirty (30) international students from Nigeria and Ghana as sample size, the researcher obtained data through questionnaires and gathered information on their experiences and challenges.

The research results indicated that majority of the respondents did not speak the Finnish language, thereby, making it very difficult to interact and socialize as well as have access to social services. Some respondents also stated challenges in adjusting to the general Finnish way of life. The data also revealed that some intercultural barriers the respondents encountered were stereotyping, prejudice, etc. Furthermore, some of the respondents stated that they misconstrued and misinterpreted some non-verbal communication symbols like body language, gestures, facial expressions etc. The challenges they experienced however, did not negatively affect their studies as the medium of instruction was English.

The research also concluded with recommendations such as compulsory Finnish lessons for international students. Other recommendations included organizing more intercultural programmes to promote interaction e.g. international week, festivals, fun fare, debates, excursions and group discussions. These recommendations are crucial to dispel stereotypes, misinterpretations and other misconceptions that exist in the various cultures. This could serve as an avenue to bond and learn from each other’s cultures.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Education is a non-stop action of acquiring or giving knowledge, skills, or a wealth of knowledge through regular instructions. Ravi (2015:1) sees education ‘as the most important and powerful instrument invented by mankind to shape and mould himself in a desirable manner’. He goes further to explain that ‘Education is anything the individual acquires through formal or non-formal organization … by which his personality is prepared and developed to undertake any sort of tasks and adjust himself with the environments in order to fulfill basic necessities and objectives of life’ (p.3). In fact, it has been realized that international education gives the necessary exposure to secure a better future. Due to the above stated reasons people migrate from Africa to further their studies outside their various countries. In their quest for international education, African students try to establish intercultural relations in their host countries and the problems they encounter are the focal point of this research.

In his theory on hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1943) posited that human beings have various levels of needs and that once one level of need is satisfied, there is a move to satisfy the next one. These needs include:

- Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.;
- Safety/security: out of danger;
- Belongingness and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; and
- Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition.

One can deduce from Maslow’s explanation that human beings are always in the process of satisfying their needs. Consequently, more and more people are satisfying their needs by improving upon their lives through education.

Basically, education is seen as a means by which people could meet their aspirations for development and upward mobility (Schofield, 1999). Furthermore, it is also understood by many as a means of overcoming handicaps, achieving greater parity and obtaining prosperity and social status (Sargent, 1994). It is no secret that educational systems in third world economies like Ghana 1
and Nigeria cannot be compared to that of the developed countries. In most cases, educational systems in developing countries are below standard with limited available programmes. Obviously, some students’ desire to satisfy their educational needs may not be met as such opportunities may not be available in their home countries. This need becomes a pull factor serving as a driving force for people to migrate to other countries to further their studies.

Another pull factor for migration is the quest for greener pastures. However, upon arriving at their destination, the stark reality dawns on them that they need to obtain further education or some training in the host country to enable them obtain good jobs. Also globalization has promoted international education. This point is reinforced by Samovar et al (2012). According to them, movement of people has been aided by advancement in technology and sophistication in communication. This has led to transference of huge amount of information from one country to the other and has also led to improvement in transportation that has ultimately led to easy movement of people and property (Samovar et al, 2012).

As cited by Victoria (2011:12), the 2006 United Nations International Migration Report indicates that people today more than at any other points in history, live outside the country of their birth. Blad & Couton (2009) also predicted that movements across international borders will continue to increase as the years proceed. As a result of migration flows particularly in the last 50 years, the ethno-cultural make-up of the entire globe has been altered. Globalization, communication technology, and mass migration have changed the world’s linguistic landscape (Crystal, 2003; Cook and North, 2010).

Most institutions of higher learning are now focusing on admitting students from different countries and backgrounds, the “internationalization” of various campuses is now a new trend and also the number of students choosing to study abroad is increasing. In 2010, there were an estimated eight hundred and fifty (850,000) non-Europeans in Europe studying in various tertiary institutions (Schuetze 2012). According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics Fact sheet for (2010) the global gross enrollment ratio (GER) for tertiary institutions has expanded in the last few decades. In fact, enrollment in tertiary education grew faster in sub-Saharan Africa than any other region over the last four decades. Despite the rapid expansion over the past several decades, tertiary education systems in sub-Saharan Africa are not equipped to absorb the growing demand that has resulted from broader access to secondary education. Other issues include non-availability of courses of choice for the students. The obvious option is for the students to travel abroad for education.
Writing under the title “Report on International Mobility of African Students, Marshal (2013:1), reports that “there were 380,376 African students on the move in 2010, representing about a tenth of all international students worldwide.” This is confirmed by ICEF Monitor (2013) that of the 380,376 African students electing to study abroad in 2010 (representing roughly 10% of the world’s international students).

In their quest for better education, international students are faced with enormous intercultural communication issues, more stringent visa acquisition processes and in some cases less hospitable attitudes around the world. These students arrive with their own beliefs, culture and way of life which is different from their host countries; this may ultimately lead to barriers and inter-cultural clashes. This is confirmed by Hsiao-ping Wu et al (2015) that many international students face challenges as they pursue higher education outside of their home countries. They explain further that the students face obstacles, such as different food, unfamiliar living circumstances, financial problems, balancing work, studying schedules, learning styles, or any difficulties related to language, culture, and personal barriers. A series of transitional difficulties can be from daily life to cultural adaptation.

Culture is as an integrated system of learned behaviour patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not a result of biological inheritance. Furthermore, culture in the sociological field can be defined as the ways of thinking, the ways of acting, and the material object that together shape a people’s way of life. Culture can be any two types, non-material and material culture (Hoebel, 1966).

Culture is absorbed by members of a society through socialization. The process of an individual learning and acquiring an element of a given culture (as part of his behaviour) is known as socialization. It is evident that every society or country has its own culture, belief systems and way of life. Therefore, migrant students arrive in the host country with their own way of life, language, and perception. Indeed, for them to survive they need to adapt to the host country’s culture which could only be achieved by means of cross cultural relations. The migrants can establish intercultural relations only through intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is the face-to-face every day interaction between people of different cultures (Marcionis, 2010).

Samovar et al (2007:10) state that “intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perception and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event.”
The process by which individuals share ideas, information and attitudes can be described as communication. Effective communication occurs when the receiver of the information understands the meaning of the message and reacts appropriately. Transmitting the message could be through verbal (language) and non-verbal means i.e. symbols, gestures, facial expressions and body language (Scholes, 1997). Language is one of the primary means by which people interact and thereby build intercultural relations. Furthermore, Victoria (2011:13) opines that “When people leave their country of origin or residence and migrate to a new country, they make conscious decisions regarding what to bring with them and what to leave behind. They often have to give up their homes, jobs, schools, and a certain lifestyle that they have been accustomed to. They leave family and friends behind. Language is the one thing that they take with them wherever they go, regardless of whether they use it in the new country or not.”

In addition to language, migrants take with them their perceptions, attitudes, stereotypes. The migrants’ impression formation about the host country would be based on their own culture which in most cases is different. The migrants therefore may misconstrue especially non-verbal language such as facial expressions, eye contact, body language and other gestures as they come into contact with the unfamiliar ways of the host country. Through language, migrants try to interact with the people of the host country to learn their culture. Undoubtedly, it is quite a difficult task in the beginning due to the differences in the languages and gestures, facial expressions etc. Some host countries have a history of xenophobia and racism and so sometimes no matter how inter-culturally competent the migrant student may be and tries to adapt to the culture of the host country, the case of xenophobia and racism make it difficult. The migrants therefore, encounter a lot of intercultural communication barriers and adaptability problems (Victoria, 2012). The students therefore adapt strategies to help them overcome the challenges they encounter.

The study setting for this research is the University of Eastern Finland (UEF) specifically, Joensuu campus. International students are attracted to UEF and other institutions of higher learning in Finland especially because of their free tuition programmes. They therefore make a conscious effort to apply and study in Finland. Furthermore, there is also opportunity for students to work whilst schooling and that goes a long way to improve upon their lives.

University of Eastern Finland was established in the year 2010. UEF came into being after the University of Joensuu and Kuopio was joined to form the UEF. University of Eastern Finland has three
Campuses, namely Joensuu, Kuopio and Savonlinna. Joensuu is a town situated in North Karelia, Eastern Finland, and as at December 2013, the population of Joensuu was 74,471, (Statistics Finland). Joensuu is a very vibrant city with over 15,000 students studying at the University of Eastern Finland. There are also an estimated 1,400 international students. It is a city friendly towards students and has diverse nationalities including Africans (www.uef.fi).

The UEF offers over 100 subject fields, the university has faculties like Philosophy, Science, Forestry, Health Sciences and Social Sciences. The UEF staff and students are also involved in various exchange programmes. Moreover, the university is involved in several international networks and discipline-specific projects. Due to its extensive networks, this multidisciplinary and international university constitutes a significant competence cluster, which promotes the well-being and positive development of eastern Finland. The UEF has modern facilities for more than 1500 international students (www.uef.fi). The researcher also happens to be an international student from Ghana at the University of Eastern Finland. The researcher’s interest in this area/subject arose as a result of his personal experiences as an International student in Joensuu.

1.2 Aims and Research Questions

The study aimed at offering empirical evidence on how Ghanaian and Nigerian students in Finland manage to establish intercultural relations in their interaction with their contemporaries in Joensuu, the problems encountered and whether these problems had any effect on their intercultural relations in Finland. Hopkins (1999:36) articulates that today, “in their goals and mission statements, most colleges and universities include some version of ‘knowledge of other cultures’ as a component of a liberal education.” Most institutions of higher education are now promoting diversity and multiculturalism and therefore encouraging qualified international students to apply for admission into these institutions. However, it has its merits and demerits. There is concern about how international students perceive the intercultural communication (i.e. verbal and non-verbal) in relation to their own cultures, the culture of the host country, issues of ethnocentrism, racism, stereotyping, prejudice, language, seeking similarities and non-verbal misinterpretations.

As mentioned earlier, the students arrive with their own perceptions and initially encounter problems in their attempt to settle in the host country. Ghanaian and Nigerian students living in Finland as a result of their race may experience problems such as racism and so on. The increased number of international students makes the topic of this study a contemporary one. The study seeks to establish the problems Ghanaian and Nigerian students encounter in their attempt to establish
intercultural relations with their fellow students, lecturers, and the community within which they live and whether these problems had any effect on their intercultural relations in Finland. The researcher (who is a Ghanaian and a student at UEF) sees this as a contemporary phenomenon and therefore decided to research into the experiences of international students from the African continent in Finland, specifically students from the Republic of Ghana and Nigeria studying at the University of Eastern Finland and residing in Joensuu. The research questions will answer the following questions:

- What is the nature of the communication between Ghanaian and Nigerian students, the Finns and other nationals?
- Which communication barriers such as racial abuse, prejudice, stereotyping, negative perceptions, misunderstanding of facial expressions, body language, gestures and symbols have the Ghanaian and Nigerian students encountered and how they overcame them?
- What are the institutional policies or programmes implemented to enhance communication skills and intercultural competence?

1.3 **Scope and Significance**

The study concentrated on Ghanaian and Nigerian Students of University of Eastern Finland (UEF) in Finland particularly those living in Joensuu. It examined how the Ghanaian and Nigerian students handled the issues of differences in African and Finnish cultures. There were other African students from other countries who could have been part of the study to bring out interesting results and also add another dimension to the study, however, the researcher focused on Ghanaian and Nigerian students due to time constraints and limited resources.

Another reason was also due to the fact that the researcher is a Ghanaian, and this research was an opportunity to review or study the experiences of other Ghanaian international students from an intellectual perspective.
CHAPTER 2

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK WITH LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework/Theory Focus

The theoretical focus for this study are two, namely: The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory and Cognitive Flexibility theory. The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory was propounded by William Gudykunst in his book “cross cultural and intercultural communication (2003). This theory takes a critical look at the cross cultural encounters or the process of intercultural communication. Gudykunst (2003) asserts that intercultural communication or cross cultural encounters are marked by a high degree of unpredictability and anxiety, most especially in communication between people. Therefore in order for communication to be successful, it rests solely on the individual’s capacity to handle the anxiety and lessen the level of uncertainty about oneself and the people/person one is communicating with. Gudykunst further states that, in order to have a successful communication or achieve intercultural communication competence, one must endeavour to manage the occurrence of anxiety and uncertainty. In order to reduce misunderstanding, Gudykunst (2003) proposes three (3) vital points - to be very observant, being weary of the “stranger” as well as well the cultural and communicative difference between the parties involved. This ultimately leads to less tension and confusion.

The Cognitive Flexibility theory on the other hand, was propounded by Brislin & Yoshida (1994:90) and it focuses on attributes such as being flexible and very open-minded to new ideas and changes as well as being highly tolerant. These attributes ultimately lead to success in the communication event. The issue of one being flexible and highly tolerant is key and critical when it comes to cross cultural encounters because without tolerating the views and opinions of people from diverse backgrounds and also not being open-minded, will ultimately lead to conflicts and confusion. From the above theories one could deduce that although there are problems associated with intercultural relations/communication due to differences in cultures, and language amongst others, with the right approaches as advocated by both theories, these could be overcome. It is hoped that at the end of the studies, the research findings will help solve some of the problems associated with intercultural relations amongst international students in Finland.
The two theories were used in this study because they both have strong points that suggest how to overcome the challenges of inter-cultural communication. However, one could also deduce a weakness in both theories. The weakness in both theories is that, one needs to be inter-culturally competent to be able to apply the strong points suggested in each theory. On the other hand, the strength of the theories complements each other. This is because A/UMT propounded by Gudykunst (2003) warns of the high unpredictability and anxiety in inter-cultural communication and suggests that one has to be observant and wary of the culture of the other. Furthermore, CFT propounded by Brislin & Yoshida (1994:90) sees tolerance, flexibility and open-mindedness as key to inter-cultural communication competence. It could be concluded that by complementing tolerance, flexibility and open-mindedness with being observant and wary of the cultural differences, one could reduce misunderstanding, misconceptions and other challenges and be more inter-culturally competent.

2.2 Review of Related Literature

In a jointly prepared paper by McKinley et al (2001:1) for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related intolerance (WCARI) in Durban, they noted that:

“Today, one in every 50 human being is a migrant worker, a refugee or asylum seeker, or an immigrant living in a ‘foreign’ country. Current estimates by the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration indicate that some 150 million people live temporarily or permanently outside their countries of origin (2.5% of the world’s population. 1). Many of these, 80-97 million, are estimated to be migrant workers and members of their families. 2) Another 12 million are refugees outside their country of origin.”

The above information confirms the current phenomenon of increasing rate of migration. Additionally, this phenomenon is associated with challenges some of which are basically due to differences in culture and misinterpretations in gestures, facial expressions etc.

Furthermore, McKinley et al (2001:9) report that the “World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCARI) (2001) has brought into focus the worrisome dimensions of racism, discrimination and xenophobia in the treatment of migrants and refugees.” They go further to explain that there had been widely reported cases of anti-foreigner hostility in all regions of the world. These include incitement to and actions of overt exclusion, hostility and violence against person explicitly based on their perceived status as foreigner, non-national, refugees, asylum seekers, etc. However, they note the basis of the ill-treatment (in certain cases) is deteriorating economic conditions in the host country. As such the citizens see the migrants as a
threat in competition for the few employment opportunities and social services available. McKinley et al advocate for the international community to work together to end such hostilities.

Despite the above enumerated challenges, migration is a necessary part of international education. In the case of this study, the Ghanaian and Nigerian students migrate from the home countries to Finland in the quest for higher education. According to the Glossary on Migration of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2004:40), the term “migrant” has no universal clear cut or standard definition. The IOM goes further to explain that the ‘the term migrant has to do with the individual deciding to relocate for a better life and also without any interference.’ Under the title ‘A Theory of Migration’ (1966) Lee’s theory on migration divides factors causing migration into two groups namely push and pull factors. The Push factors include hostile conditions that lead or force them to leave their countries to another. The Push conditions include scarce jobs, limited opportunities, civil wars and political crisis etc. Pull factors include job opportunities, better living conditions, political and right to practice ones religion, better education and safety.

Based on the Lee’s theory on migration, one can conclude that the pull factors are responsible for the migration of Ghanaian and Nigerian students to attain international education to better their lot. Although these countries have quite good educational systems, the more economically sound economies offer a better opportunity. Therefore those dreaming of equipping themselves for the global market are compelled to travel abroad for their education. In order to settle down well in the host country, students from these two countries need to be inter-culturally competent. This assertion is confirmed in a report entitled ‘International mobility of African students’ by Marshall (2013). In the report, she asserts that African students who want to broaden their outlook which would ultimately give them an “edge” on the job scene, leave their home countries in pursuit of further education abroad at colleges with better learning facilities and courses.

Campus France reports that in 2010 alone, there were 380,376 African students on the move, representing about a tenth of all international students worldwide. Marshall (2013:1) cites a Campus France report (2013) and notes that weaknesses in higher education in many African countries are some of the causes of international mobility of African student. “These include:

- Mismatch between the education on offer and social needs.
- Chronically inadequate state budgets.
- Blatant disparities between the provinces and urban centers.
- Old, dilapidated campuses coupled with expansion of student numbers.
- Demotivated, ageing teaching forces.
- Obsolete study programmes that are not adapted to the needs of society or developments in science and technology.
- Unplanned growth of private educational institutions.
- Absence of research policy.”

Generally, education takes place under guidance of knowledgeable people and it involves the processes of discussion, training and research. Through the aforementioned processes, one generation obtains knowledge, habits, beliefs and values of a particular society and passes it on to the next generation. Education generally has a positive impact on people’s way of thinking, acting and general behaviour. Furthermore, it could be formal or informal. There are two schools of thought in trying to define International education. The first one has to do with education across different countries by the exchange of students, for example, students of some Universities in English speaking countries offering Bachelor of Arts in French, often travel to French speaking countries for one year as part of the study program. (campusfrance.org).

The second school of thought sees international education as an across-the-board move that deliberately enables students to be dynamic participants in an interconnected world. The focal point is to equip individuals to value other cultures and languages to achieve social cohesion (Dewey, 1916).

Bourne et al.,(2013) are of the opinion that international education is really about making students think from a global perspective and help in contributing to a better society with their ideas and inventions. International education also connects people from different societies with different beliefs into one global village, giving students an understanding of cultural differences and letting them embrace their differences.

He goes further to explain that international education enables students to gain knowledge of other cultures and become familiar with international and global issues. Moreover, it equips students with skills to work effectively in cross-cultural environments. It is seen as something that enables students to be competent in intercultural communication whilst improving upon their disposition
towards having respect and concern for other cultures. In this era of rapid globalization, international education could be one of the tools to achieve social cohesion and dispel unsubstantiated ideas about other cultures based on stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. The fundamental issue is to obtain information about norms, values and languages of other cultures.

According to the Dictionary of Sociology (2009:152) ‘Culture is a general term for the symbolic and learned aspects of human society.’ Tylor (1871) opined that culture is made up of morals, customs and other values obtained as being part of civilization. The above definitions can be explained that a society’s culture determines its people’s way of life and general behaviour. It is obvious that getting to know one’s cultural values is a learning process of socialization. Socialization is the process by which people learn to become members of society. It is believed that both primary and secondary socialization are responsible for the adaptation of cultural practices of one’s own society. It is obvious that culture is learned. Martin and Nakayama (2007:13) in their book entitled “Experiencing Intercultural Communication: An Introduction”, see culture as group of people who have same belief, values and outlook on life.

Culture comprises several elements and migrants arrive in the host countries with some of their own cultural elements especially language, perceptions, values, among others. This is because cultural groups learn and share perceptions or ways of looking at the world which is their world-view. Martin and Nakayama (2007:32) posit that our cultural experiences influence every phase of the perception process and ultimately determine how we make sense of the world, how we respond to the people, places, things in it and the ways in which we assign meaning to the information we organize. In an article in the Howard Journal of Communications, entitled “U.S. American Student Sojourners’ Lived Experience in France: Phenomenological inquiry of cross-cultural adaptation,” Kristjánsdóttir (2009) expresses the opinion that culture is not only experienced as perception and values, but also as feelings and is consequently expressed as behaviour. These aforementioned issues are some of the cultural elements that ultimately lead to stereotyping and prejudice.

This points to the fact that every society has its own culture and therefore migrant students would have to be inter-culturally competent to enable them communicate appropriately and effectively in their attempt to establish intercultural relations in the host society. Intercultural relations can be established through communication of the language, perception and values and moreover in the process, there could be some misconceptions, misinterpretations and sometimes similarities across
2.3  **Intercultural Relations and the Communication Process**

In trying to understand what intercultural communication is all about, it is important to analyze what one considers culture and how this could be communicated effectively. According to Gudykunst (2003) some authorities limit “intercultural communication” to refer only to communication among individuals from different nationalities. Other scholars on the other hand, broaden the idea of intercultural communication to include inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-regional communication (Martin et al., 2007). There have been several studies in the area of intercultural communication. Many theorists/scholars have studied it in different perspectives.

One of such theorists is Collier (1997) who is of the view that interactions [communications] are most highly intercultural when individuals' cultural affiliation play a part in shaping the prejudices, values, language, non-verbal behaviours, and the nature of relation upon which the individuals draw conclusions. One cannot but agree with Collier (1997) that these values, prejudices, language, non-verbal behaviours and relational style are some of the elements by which peoples’ cultures are identified. Furthermore, Collier (ibid) is of the opinion that group identity (ascribed and avowed identity) is important for understanding intercultural communication. He expresses the idea that ascribed identity is the set of demographic and role descriptions that others in an interaction assume to hold true for another. Avowed identity is comprised of the group affiliations that are stronger. For instance, if an individual has fully integrated into a new culture, then the values and practices of the destination culture will figure importantly in his/her avowed culture. Consequently, to understand intercultural communication one has to understand group identity from both the perspective of ascribed and avowed identity.

Moreover, other theorists such as Brislin & Yoshida (1994) (as mentioned earlier) believe that the cognitive flexibility theory rather enhances intercultural communications. Brislin & Yoshida (1994:90) suggest that “cognitive flexibility theory highlights characteristics such as being flexible and very open-minded to new ideas and changes as well being highly tolerant.” Cognitive Flexibility Theory can be defined from various perspectives. A Theorist such as Scott (1962:25) defines it “as adjusting ones beliefs and ideas in order to meet new challenges”. These characteristics ultimately lead to success in the communication event. In a study conducted by Miller (2010) entitled “Applications of Cognitive Flexibility Theory (CFT) In Cross-Cultural Training,” he presented empirical and theoretical evidence, to provide unequivocal support for the
application of CFT in the design in training of police from different cultures. Miller is of the view that the diverse value systems and expectations that sustain cultures worldwide can no longer be ignored. He suggests that introducing this Cognitive Flexibility Theory (CFT) into a foreign police training program would have beneficial impact as well as enhance grasping of cultural awareness. Obviously, ignoring the establishment of intercultural relations in the various police training programmes in different cultures would lead to failure.

Other scholars go beyond CFT and see Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as the theory that enhances communication. This theory looks at linguistic plans to adjust gaps in communication (Giles et.al, 1991). Irrespective of the point of view of the aforementioned theorists, we can agree with Allwood (1985:1) expressing the opinion in a paper entitled ‘Intercultural Communication’, that “intercultural communication or communication between people of different cultural backgrounds has always been and will remain an important precondition of human co-existence.”

Many scholars have come up with various communication theories. However, what runs through all the theories is getting a message across effectively from a sender to a receiver. Communication has to do with being able to send and receive messages as well information, emotions and have common understanding. Being able to communicate effectively is very important in a multicultural environment. The ultimate goal in the communication process is for the people involved to understand each other. The communication could be verbal, non-verbal, written or visual which involves senders and receivers of messages. It is done via a medium to the receiver or receivers. The one sending the information must send it to the right route so that the receiver of the message is able to grasp it.

At any given moment of an interaction, there could be misinterpretation. However in order for the process to be successful, causes of misinterpretations should be reduced at various phases of the interaction. In face-to-face communication, the sender and receiver both communicate with each other, and even in very subtle ways such as through eye-contact and general body language. There are many other subtle ways that people intentionally or unintentionally communicate with others. An example is that the tone of one’s voice could tell of the emotional status. Also hand signals and gestures add to a spoken message (Crowley & Mitchell, 1994).
People of different cultures give meanings to messages according to their own understanding and cultures. The messages could be misinterpreted or rightly interpreted. It is obvious that Ghanaian and Nigerian students in Finland, especially in the first few months in the host nation, may have difficulties in interacting with fellow students as the cultures are different. The misinterpretations would be due to barriers of communication.

2.4  Barriers of Intercultural Communication

In communication, the messages are sometimes not received as it was originally intended by the sender. It is the reason why a sender of the message may expect a feedback to ensure that the receiver had actually understood the import of the message. There are many barriers to communication and these may occur at any stage in the communication process. Barriers may lead to messages becoming distorted and therefore risk causing confusion and misunderstanding. According to Martin and Nakayama (2007:40) “communication is sometimes unintentional. Indeed sometimes some of the most essential and disastrous messages are communicated unknowingly.”

They explain further that communication is first and foremost geared towards the receiver and that it is the receiver who ultimately determines the outcome of the communication situation. In order to effectively communicate, one needs to overcome the barriers of communication by carrying a brief and accurate statement. Some barriers of intercultural communication include discrimination, prejudice, emotional barriers, taboos, differences in perception and viewpoint, non-comprehension of non-verbal cues, gestures, posture and general distinctions in body language.

Arsecularatne & Yazdanifard (2013) explain that many Multinational Companies face problems in their operations due to language problems. However, in the discussion of the potential barriers for misunderstanding in intercultural communication would be focused on the following:

- Ethnocentrism.
- Anxiety.
- Assuming Similarity.
- Stereotyping and prejudice.
- Non-verbal misinterpretation.
- Language.
Ethnocentrism

Writing under the title ‘Identifying Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication’ McKeiver (2013) identified ethnocentrism as one of the barriers to an effectual intercultural communication. Neuliep (2012) opined that ethnocentrism is closely connected to intercultural communication apprehension.

Most intercultural relations can be influenced by an individual’s ethnocentric tendencies or outlook that his/her culture surpasses that of another culture. Therefore there is the tendency of individuals who are extremely ethnocentric to be apprehensive, overly sensitive and rude to international students, most often those whose values and traditions differ from theirs (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997; Spencer-Rogers & McGovern, 2002).

Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) see intercultural communication apprehension as the situation where an individual feels uneasy or nervous when they are about to or in the process of communicating with people from an unfamiliar ethnic circle. Individuals with very strong levels of ethnocentrism just like their counterparts with extreme intercultural apprehension do not often take part/involve themselves in intercultural relations (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). Neuliep, (2012) expresses the view that both intercultural communication apprehension and ethnocentrism can have negative effects on an individual’s willingness to communicate outside of the “in-group.” These two characteristics also lead to another inter-communication barrier, which is anxiety.

Anxiety

Cohen (2002) asserts that when one has no knowledge or idea about the person they are about to communicate with, the apprehension and fear automatically becomes greater. Intercultural communication anxiety is partially due to communication obstacles such as a student’s language ability, differences in expression of emotion, and differences in verbal and non-verbal communication styles (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Members of both parties (in group or out group) may feel a sense of restlessness and a bit cautious even before the commencement of the interaction, this can ultimately lead to a bit of apprehension on both sides. In cases where an individual becomes extremely nervous, the normal step is to completely shun the process of intercultural relations, and this development has its own consequences (Neuliep, 2012).
Assuming Similarity

Indeed most international students are aware that some cultural differences exist between their own cultures and that of the host society and therefore endeavour to reduce the uncertainties associated with trying to initiate any form of intercultural relations. Sometimes some students also assume that there are similarities in the various cultures. This is confirmed by Berger and Calabrese (1975) with their Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). In that theory they explain that URT presupposes that our main aim during the beginning stages of communication is to minimize the level of hesitancy (Barna, 1997) identified assuming similarities in cultures as one of the hurdles in intercultural relations. He explained that when one doesn’t have any information about a culture, it’s natural to assume there are no differences, on the contrary each culture is different and unique to some degree. On the other hand assuming difference instead of similarity can lead to one not acknowledging the collective similarities in cultures.

Stereotyping and Prejudice

Stereotypes are a form of general viewpoint broadly held about a group of people. Such broadly held viewpoints when firmly held are potentially dangerous. For example, there are general stereotypes held against African-Americans as being lazy, welfare-dependent, or more prone to violence than whites (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Therefore if one interacted with African-Americans based on these beliefs, one is likely to have a gloomy picture of the African American. Prejudice is a negative opinion or unreasonable attitude towards a group of people which has no logical basis and sometimes defies rational influence (Davidio & Gaetner, 2010).

Martin and Nakayama (2007:57) explain that where as stereotypes portray a group’s characteristics, prejudice indicates how we are to perceive that group of people. Most often people have a certain pre-conceived idea of what they want to hear, they often make inaccurate interpretations/judgment.

Non-verbal Misinterpretation

Non-verbal communication can be achieved through the process of communication through sending and receiving visual cues between people. It encompasses the use of physical appearance, distance, touch and voice. Others include the informal space around the body and eye contact which comprises the actions of looking while talking and listening, the rate of glances, the sequence of preoccupation, pupil dilation, and frequency of eye blinking are all considered as non-verbal communication. Despite what the name depicts, there are non-verbal elements in speech which are
made up of the quality of the voice, its rate, the pitch, the volume and peculiarity of the way one speaks as well as the pattern and articulation (Littlejohn & Foss, 1999).

According to the Concise Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioural Science (2004), non-verbal communication is the process of sending a concealed message and the receiver’s ability to interpret it. Encoding is the process of creating the information such as demeanour, signals and gestures on the face. Decoding has to do with translating the message obtained.

Paradise (1994) believes that culture is an integral part of non-verbal communication, and that it helps influence how learning activities are organized. In an article on the “Mazahua Children”, it posited that non-verbal communication acts as a valued means by which the children learn, because it is an important aspect of culture. Consequently, non-verbal communication is a basic means of conveying cultural values and children participate in that system at a tender age (Paradise, 1994).

The goodbye gesture is common to the Ghana, Nigeria and other West African countries. However in some European countries, a goodbye gesture is stretching out the hand and bringing the fingers up and down. More often than not when people do not share the same language, they resort to hand gestures to communicate. However, they discover that there could be misinterpretations of their gestures. According to Jandt (2010) non-verbal expressions vary from culture to culture. For example, even with such generally acknowledged non-verbal expressions like nodding the head up and down in agreement and shaking the head from side to side to mean “no”, there are wide variations. In European countries like Albania and Bulgaria, the “yes”-“no” gestures are reversed. Additionally, in Ceylon, a “yes” answer to a specific question is an emphatic nod of the head but a general agreement is indicated by sideways swaying of the head. Furthermore, greeting in the United States of America (USA) is a firm handshake with a direct eye contact and sometimes a hug. On the contrary, in Ecuador, to greet a person without handshake signifies a special respect (Jandt, 2010).

**Language**

Language can be seen as a system of spoken or written symbols used by people in a shared culture to communicate with each other. Disparities in language have been considered as a hurdle to
intercultural communication between visitors and hosts (Cohen, 2004; Edgell & Haenisch, 1995). Several scholars maintain that the difference in language spoken by immigrant students and people of the host country is one of the major barriers to intercultural relations. However, Mancini-Cross et al. (2009) argue “that lack of language fluency, under particular, well-identified conditions, does not inevitably create a barrier but may enhance visitors’ enjoyment and contribute to cross-cultural interactions” (Mancini -Cross et al, 2009). Their research shows that the culture shock tourists experience in the host country could be a positive push factor (Ting-Toomey, 1999). This is likely to enhance and stimulate the tourists’ intercultural skills (Pearce, 2005). This unique research finding points to the fact that the language gap and intercultural inexperience of travellers could rather become a positive rather than negative attribute in the intercultural interactions between host and guests.

The Mancini-Cross et al (2009) research findings notwithstanding, Kim (2011) writing in an article entitled ‘the impact of language barrier and Cultural Differences on Intercultural Communication’ opined that Language is the most visible hurdle to intercultural communication but it may not be the major problem. He goes further to explain that people who do not have a good command over another person’s language or do not speak the same language, is likely to have difficulties trying to interact to establish an intercultural relations with people of the host country.

There is always the prospect of miscommunication/misinterpretation/misunderstanding occurring between people from unrelated cultures with contrasting mother tongues. It must be noted however that, sharing a common language does not give assurance of understanding. There are instances where people who share the same mother tongue still have issues with understanding of the meanings of words. Other ways in which language can be a barrier to intercultural communication are problems of vocabulary, idiomatic, experiential and conceptual equivalence. Most of often absence of vocabulary correlation arises when one particular language doesn't have adequate words that accurately match that of the opposing one (Jandt, 2001).

2.5 Cultural characteristics of Finland, Nigeria and Ghana

Some of the characteristics of culture include norms, social values, food, language, art, literature, clothing, music, dance, media, and sports amongst others. However, for the purpose of this study, the discussion is limited to norms, social values and language. In intercultural relations, several different cultures come together to interact which obviously involves norms, language and social values. The focus of this study is find out the challenges migrant students from Ghana and Nigeria
experience in the process of settling down in the host country – Finland. Obviously, these three nations have different norms, social values and languages.

Values are beliefs which are morals or principles derived from social interaction and accepted as integral facts of the social structure. Values are expected to help integrate individual behaviour and social action so as to achieve social cohesion. Members of every society would have to understand the social values to be able to understand, judge or evaluate other people’s action. Norms and values have a significant relation. Norms are rules that prescribe specific behaviour in given circumstances. Additionally, language is the means by which members of a society communicate. Obviously, due to differences in language, norms and social values, actors in the process of cultural interaction/communication would experience challenges.

**Finland**

Finland shares border on the east with Russia, on the south with Estonia, with Sweden and Gulf of Bothnia (the Baltic Sea) on the west and on the northwest with Norway. The most closely linked languages to the Finnish Language are Estonian, Votish, Livonian, Vepsian, as well as the Karelian dialects of the Balto-Finnic branch. Besides Finnish, Swedish is the second official language of Finland and about six per cent (6%) of Finns speak the Swedish language. Furthermore, the Finns are naturally quiet and reserved people. They hardly interact with random people or people they are not familiar with. They have certain directness in dealing with people which may be misinterpreted to be rudeness. Some foreigners think the Finnish have a closed culture. The Finnish have a strong sense of national identity and may not take it kindly when criticized by foreigners or visitors. Writing under the topic ‘A guide to Finnish Custom and Manners,’ Alho & Marjukka (2002) indicate that the use of first names in addressing people also indicates a form of close tie or relationship in the Finnish culture. The customary greeting of the Finns involves a firm handshake, direct eye contact with the person, and occasionally a slight nod of the head, kissing and hugging being uncommon forms of greeting.

Religion is an important aspect of the Finnish culture and the majority of the population are Christians. Although in recent times, Finns have come into contact with other religions due to increase in the number of immigrants, their tolerance for people of different religions and cultures keeps improving (Alho, 2002).
Ghana

Ghana, previously known as Gold Coast during the colonial era was one of the first African countries to gain independence from the British colonists in 1957. Ghana is located on the west coast of Africa. It shares borders with Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Burkina Faso, Togo, and the Atlantic Ocean. Ghana’s climate is warm and humid; there are periods of rain and Harmattan season which is also known as the “dry winter” (Gocking, 2005). Ghana has over 100 linguistic and cultural groups with the official language being English also Akan (twi) is considered to be the second unofficial language. The major ethnic groups in Ghana include the Akan, Ewe, Mole-Dagbane, Guan, and Ga-Adangbe.

Ghanaian place premium on politeness, hospitality, and formality. It is the norm for one to greet a friend/relative by shaking hands and also inquiring about each other’s welfare or health/family. Age and social status are highly valued in the Ghanaian society, therefore a younger person is obliged to accord the needed respect and honour to an individual who is older or has a higher “social standing” than himself/herself. There is respect for the elderly, and one is expected to accord the needed respect to someone who is older than him/her. Most often insults are not encouraged and deemed highly offensive and are used to be used only in instances of intense provocation.

It is highly unacceptable to give direction, wave or take an object with the left hand in the Ghanaian society. Another unacceptable practice is to stare or point your fingers at people in a public gathering or at people (Obiri, 2015). Religion plays an integral role in the life of an average Ghanaians. There is the Christian, Islamic as well the African traditional religion. However, the most dominant religions are the Christian and Islamic religion.

Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria in the West African Region, gained independence from the British in 1960. It has more than 250 tribes, the largest being the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo tribes. It shares borders on the west with Benin republic, on the north with Niger and Chad and on the east with Cameroon. The official language of Nigeria is English and Hausa is widely considered as the
unofficial second language. Pidgin language (a combination of African languages and English) is also a common means of communication in southern Nigeria. Religion also plays a major role in the Nigerians’ lives, 50% of its populace are Christians, Muslims make up about forty per cent of the population whiles the remaining ten per cent practice various African traditional religions (Levy, 1996).

Social status and age are of great value and importance in the Nigerian society and it is expected that the younger ones accord the elders in society the needed honour and respect. On meeting an acquaintance, it is the practice to greet and shake hands and inquire about the welfare of each other/families. It is totally unacceptable to shake hands, eat or even hand over an object with the left hand; it is a sign of disrespect (Achu, 1992).

2.6 Similarities Between Ghana-Nigerian Cultural Features in contrast to Culture of Finland

Obviously, it could be deduced from the above reviews that there are some differences as well as similarities in the cultures of Ghana and Nigeria. Some similarities include the use of the left hand, how the older generation relate to the younger generation and some non-verbal symbols.

The Use of the Left Hand

In both cultures, the use of the left hand for greeting is a taboo. Furthermore, eating with the left hand is not acceptable or hygienic because it is assumed that the left hand is used to clean oneself when he or she visits the toilet. Again in both cultures, giving direction or handing an item over with the left hand is seen as a sign of disrespect. There is even an adage in Ghana that no one gives direction to his father’s house with his left hand which means giving direction with the left hand has negative connotation.

Older Generation Relating to the Younger Generation

In both cultures, it expected that the younger ones in the society would accord the elderly with honour and respect. In that regard, a young person is not to talk back to the elder (even when the younger one has some explanation). Moreover, he or she is expected to give up his/her seat for the elder (it is a sign of disrespect if the younger one seat with the elders standing). Public display of affec-
tion (like kissing and hugging) is frowned upon in both cultures except instances where its mother-child.

**Non-Verbal Symbols:**
In both cultures, there are similar issues on non-verbal symbols like eye contact, nodding of head etc. In the case of eye contact, it is a sign of respect to look down or look in the elder’s direction to show that the younger one is attentive but not a direct eye contact. Direct eye contact is a sign of disrespect. Most non-verbal symbols are the same in both cultures. Nodding of the head up and down is an affirmation whilst sideways shaking of the head is negative.

**Differences in the Cultures of the two West African Countries and Finland:**
It is an offence to direct, wave or pass an item with the left hand in the Ghanaian and Nigerian cultures however, it is not so in the culture of Finland. Also, younger ones are given the chance to be assertive as compared to that of the West African youth who are allowed to speak back to their elders and also punctuality (The concept of “African time”).

It is an offence to give directions or pass an item over with the left hand, regardless of the recipients age. Left-handed children are also prevented from eating with their left hand. They are constantly disciplined till they confirm to the “normal” way of eating.

Another difference in cultures between the two West African countries and that of Finland is that, children in Finland are allowed to be more assertive and can challenge or speak back to an elder one in case they do not agree with something that is being put across. This situation is in sharp contrast to that of the two West African neighbours where talking back or challenging an older person is highly frowned upon and in several instances lead to severe punishment from parents or guardian.

The younger one is expected to obey the instruction even if they don't necessarily agree with the situation or whatever is being put across.

“African time” is a term used to describe the casual attitude that many Africans exhibit towards time. Unfortunately this attitude has now become deeply rooted in the African culture in the sense that, majority of African events start a couple of hours after the stipulated start time. Being Punctual to meetings and appointments is also a rare occurrence. It is common to see some school children and workers walking casually to school/work well past the official starting time. Politicians are also habitual late-comers and are almost always an hour or two late to events.

The situation in Finland is a sharp contrast to that of the two West African neighbours. One is expected to arrive on time to events and appointments, and also in cases where one can't arrive on
time due to certain reasons, one is expected to communicate the mishap to the other parties involved as well as your new arrival time. Punctuality is very important in Finnish culture whereas punctuality is almost non-existent in the West African culture.

Most Finns are proud of any official rank or title they may hold, however when most Finns are introducing themselves to people, they usually mention their first names and not their titles or ranks. Finns expect to be addressed with their first names and not their Academic, professional titles. Most Professionals are comfortable with being addressed with their first names and not “Doctor, Professor etc.

The workers address their bosses by their first names, colleagues also address each other by first names regardless of their ages or position.

The situation is not the same in Ghana and Nigeria. One is expected to attach the appropriate title to the names of individuals when addressing. It is also common for a Ghanaian /Nigerian Doctor to introduce himself/herself as “Doctor” or “Professor” before mentioning the first name.

Failing to address an individual with his/her appropriate title is viewed as a sign of disrespect. The only exception to this rule are the parents of these professionals or much older family members.

The situation in the Nigerian society is also similar. Most influential or rich individuals who have contributed immensely towards the growth of the society are usually honoured with chieftaincy titles.

These individuals are supposed to be addressed with the title “chief” before their other names. This practice is now a common occurrence. Some influential individuals have also been conferred with Honorary doctorates due to their contributions to society. These individuals are supposed to be addressed with their titles as well. Failure to address an individual with the appropriate title is highly frowned upon and unacceptable and it is seen as a clear sign of disrespect and poor upbringing.

Students are supposed to address their teacher as Mr, Miss, or Mrs or most often Sir or Madam. A student cannot call a teacher with his/her first name, this act when attempted may attract a severe punishment from the teacher or school authorities.

The younger ones are expected to add “bra” or “sista” to the names of the older ones each time they address them e.g.(bra Paul, sister Vida etc.). “Bra” or “Sista” can be informally equated to “Mr” or “Mrs” in the Ghanaian society (Alho, 2002; Achu 1992; Obiri 2015; Ewokor, 2007 & Gocking, 2005).

**Similarities in all the three cultures:**

Despite the differences in the three cultures, there are some similarities that is in all the cultures. All cultures shake hands with the right hand. All three cultures shake hands and greet with the right hand.
Honesty/integrity is also highly rated in all cultures, one is expected to always honour agreements and be truthful and straightforward in all dealings.

Honest people are highly respected in African societies and the Finnish culture as well. Another common similarity has to do with hard work. It is evident that all three cultures respect and appreciate hard working people and do not tolerate any form of laziness or idleness. Regardless of the income generated, one is encouraged to be engaged in some form of venture or activity rather than being idle (Alho, 2002; Achu 1992 & Obiri 2015).
CHAPTER 3

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and approach.

This section explains the design of the research defining the sampling procedures, instruments for data collection and procedures for processing the data. The geographical location of the study area or where the study was conducted, the population, the study design as well as the sample are described in details in this section. Another aspect that is also discussed are the methods or procedures employed to ensure that the data collection instrument is credible and trustworthy.

The data collection instrument is also mentioned and discussed in detail.

The critical point of the accomplishment of a research project is based on its methodical preparation and execution. A research design should draw attention to issues about “how, why, where and when” of the research study. Yin (2009) sees it as a research strategy which is an empirical inquiry into a phenomenon.

The focus of this project is education and intercultural relations. It is the study of how international African students specifically the Ghanaian and Nigerian students in Joensuu (Finland) try to establish intercultural relations whilst settling in the host country. The appropriate research design chosen is a case study. It involved the evaluation of the following (amongst others):

- the nature of the communication between the Ghanaian and Nigerian students, the Finns and other nationals;
- The nature of curricular elements and institutional policies implemented to enhance communication skills and intercultural competence.

By so doing, the study documented communication barriers and intercultural communication problems the students encountered such as racial abuse, prejudice, stereotyping, negative perceptions, misunderstanding of facial expressions, body language, gestures and symbols among others. Consequently, the study established whether these international students’ experiences abroad aided them in acquiring communication skills needed to work effectively on the Global market.

The appropriateness of the research design is outlined by Kumekpor (1999:100). According to him, “The case study method is appropriate in situations where solutions or decisions are sought for individual persons [groups of people] or issues or the basis of circumstances peculiar to them rather
than imposing general solutions, or decisions or applying general regulations or principles. Case studies are also used to correct, verify, devise or re-evaluate information, knowledge, existing estimates, decisions, policies, attitude and views on specific issues, situations, etc.”

Furthermore, Kumekpor (1999:100) explains that by choosing a case study as a research design for one’s research, an investigator could easily understand a social situation “in order to suggest practical solutions relating to the case in question.” Shepard & Greene (2003) posit that a case study is a type of research that has to do with a thorough examination of a particular individual or a category of people. It is noted here that although there are a number of research strategies, the case study was chosen as the most appropriate.

A qualitative and quantitative research approach was employed. Burns & Grove (1993:777) define quantitative research as a fixed, factual and consistent procedure used in defining and evaluating similarities and also review of cause and effect among variables. A descriptive survey design was also employed. Descriptive surveys are normally employed in cases where the target is quite huge to observe personally (Mouton 1996:232).

The researcher collected information from the respondents through self-administered questionnaires circulated personally by the researcher. The reason for using the descriptive survey in this regard was to present a more detailed account of the attributes, perspectives, perceptions of an individual or setting. This design was implemented to fulfill the objectives of the study or research, that is to document the nature of intercommunication between the respondents (Ghanaian and Nigerian students) and the Finns, as well as intercultural communication barriers encountered and also to document institutional policies employed to enhance intercultural communication.

### 3.2 Population

Burns and Grove (1993:779) define a population as all the components, that is (individuals, objects and events) that satisfy the sample specification to be included in a study.

The target population consisted of International African students from Ghana and Nigeria studying at the University of Eastern Finland (Joensuu). The population consisted of International Master and Doctor of Philosophy students (PhD) Students studying at University of Eastern Finland from the 2012, 2013 and 2014 academic years. To gain a perfect picture of the study, all international students from Ghana and Nigeria studying at the University of Eastern Finland should have been included in the respondents to the questionnaires to gather data. However, it was not possible to do so due to
3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

There are several sampling techniques comprising accidental, purposive and quota. According to Kumekpor (1999:131) “sampling is a carefully selected portion of the population, which is considered to be representative of the total population as to the aspect to be investigated and enumerated.” He goes further to explain that in purposive sampling, the units of the sample are selected not by a random procedure, but they are intentionally/deliberately picked for study because of their characteristics or due to the fact that they satisfy certain qualities or they exhibit most of the characteristics of interest to the study. In that regard, purposive sampling was chosen as the most appropriate sampling technique for the study to help achieve the set objective of the study. The researcher purposely selected Ghanaian and Nigerian students pursuing higher education at the University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu.

The respondents or subjects chosen to partake in the survey were selected to meet a particular criteria. The international student had to fulfill the following criteria
- Be nationals of either Ghana or Nigeria
- Be studying at the University of Eastern Finland
- Be residing in Joensuu
- Be willing to participate
- Be either a male or female
- The level of education was not important (it included both Masters and PhD students)

A sample size of thirty (30) was chosen at random to represent all the Nigerian and Ghanaian from 2012, 2013 and 2014 academic years studying in UEF. According to data received from UEF Students and Learning Services, there were about 54 (fifty-four) Ghanaian and 38 (thirty eight) Nigerian students studying in UEF, adding up to a population of ninety-two (92). Thirty (30) students were selected (at random) from a list of Nigerian and Ghanaian students as the sample for this study which is almost twenty-eight percent (28%) of the total population.

3.4 Instruments for Data Collection

In his book entitled ‘research methodology’ Kumar (2005) states there are two major approaches to gathering data/information. Based on the approaches data or information is grouped into two
sources, that is primary and secondary data. Some of the instruments for data collection include observation, interview and questionnaire. For this study, one data collection instrument was used that is questionnaire.

A questionnaire is an electronic or printed self-report layout outlined to generate written answers and information from respondents. Questions asked in a personal interview are usually more detailed than that of a questionnaire, however they both generate equivalent data (Burns & Grove 1993:368).

Questionnaires were used for this particular research because
- They guaranteed a greater response rate as the researcher personally issued the questionnaires to the respondents to be completed and subsequently collected personally by the researcher.
- They often demand very little time and strength to distribute.
- They also presented an avenue for anonymity because the respondents did not have to write their names.

A questionnaire was designed for the respondents and it requested information on their background information as well as eliciting information regarding the objectives of the research. The questions were presented in a simple and concise manner thereby making it very easy to understand. A few of the questions were open-ended which yielded qualitative data. The qualitative data were reported through in depth description and analysis in the chapter on analysis. It had nineteen (19) questions made up of both open-ended and close-ended questions. It had two (2) questions for personal information, seventeen (17) other questions made up of thirteen (13) Close-ended and four (4) open-ended ones. The open ended questions were added to generate a more detailed response from the respondents. The close-ended questions were added to make the analysis simple and less complicated.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection instrument used was a carefully designed questionnaire.

The student and learning services provided the researcher with the emails as well as the list of Ghanaian and Nigerian students at the University of Eastern Finland from the 2012, 2013 and 2014 academic years. The researcher then proceeded to contact a few of the students and exchanged phone numbers with a number of the students. The researcher subsequently arranged to meet a number of the students on Campus. The questionnaires were then distributed to these students and collected afterwards. The other half of the questionnaires were distributed at a social gathering (church) often attended by African students (mostly Ghanaians and Nigerians).
The Ghanaian and Nigerian students who were willing to partake in the survey were asked to fill the questionnaires and subsequently collected by the researcher. The questionnaires were delivered by hand and retrieved personally from respondents in close proximity. In all, the questionnaires were pre-tested for one (1) week and data collection took twenty (20) days. A very important issue that came to play in the data collection was the confidentiality of personal information provided by respondents. However this was taken care of by inserting a piece of information in the questionnaire that assured respondents that all information about them would not be made public. In that regard, the respondents were not required to provide their names to provide a kind of anonymity. Out of the thirty (30) questionnaires distributed to the Ghanaian and Nigerian international students in Joensuu, twenty-three (23) of the questionnaires were completed and returned, five (5) were not returned and the remaining two (2) were unusable. The researcher also being a Ghanaian student at U.E.F also made it a bit easier to have access to the other Ghanaian and Nigerian students and ultimately made the respondents feel a bit more relaxed and willing to partake in the interview.

Pretesting
A pretest is defined as the try-out distribution of an instrument to uncover shortcomings or limitations. It is crucial to establish whether a questionnaire is clear and concise and also whether it tackle all the required areas (Polit & Hungler 1995:38,711).

The researcher pretested the questionnaire on four respondents who satisfied the set criteria for the respondents. Two students from Ghana and another two from Nigeria filled the questionnaire during the pretesting days. All the questions were answered and no major changes were made to the existing questions.

3.6 Data Analysis
Frequency analysis and percentage distribution technique was used in the analyzing of the data. The data obtained was first sorted, edited after which, they were analyzed. The analyses were both qualitative and quantitative. Frequency tables and pie charts were used for the discussion of the quantitative analysis and interpreted by the researcher.

During the analysis of the data, one key measure that had to be employed was **paraphrasing** some of the answers to the open-ended questions.

**Paraphrasing** basically has to do with the researcher re-wording or interpreting some of the re-
spondents written answers in a different way without changing the message being carried across (de Vos et al, 2006:289).

The researcher paraphrased a number of vague answers to the open ended questions for the purpose of clarity but maintained the real opinions or message. This procedure was meticulously done to avoid misinterpreting what the respondent meant.

**Ethical considerations**

Anonymity and confidentiality was a key aspect of this study. Burns and Grove (1993:776) define anonymity as a situation where respondents in an interview cannot be connected or associated with their personal responses. Anonymity was ensured through the research because the respondents.

**Scientific Honesty** is also a very crucial ethical practice when one is conducting a research. Some of the Unethical practices involves falsification of the design and methods as well as changing your data to fit the expected results (Brink 1996:47). The researcher followed all the laid down procedures and accurately entered the information provided by the respondents. The researcher presented the true data provided by the respondents and avoided any form of data manipulation. The analysis of the open-ended questions were also done in an Honest and impartial manner.
CHAPTER 4

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Data available from the respondents show that male respondents were sixteen (16) whilst the female respondents were nine (9) being sixty-one per cent (61%) and thirty-nine (39%) respectively. The above findings is confirmed by a Report from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010:3) “Contrary to global trends, women remain disadvantaged in terms of access to tertiary education in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as South and West Asia. The tertiary gross enrollment ratio (GER) in sub-Saharan Africa for women is 4.8%, compared to 7.3% for men.” The data also indicated the ages of the respondents. This is shown in the figure below:

Fig. 1 Percentage Distribution - Age of Respondents

Fig. 1 – Age distribution of Respondents

The above figure shows that the 20-30 years age range of the respondents had a majority that is sixteen (16) being seventy per cent (70%). Furthermore, the 30-50 year old range constituted thirty
per cent (30%) of the total respondents. There were no respondents for the 0-20 years as well as the 50 years and above age range. Percentage Distribution for the nationality of respondents were as follows: Ghanaians - 48% and Nigerians - 52%.

The Pie chart Fig 2.0 also shows the level of studies of the respondents. Majority of the respondents, that is seventy-eight per cent (78%) were pursuing a Master’s degree whiles twenty-two per cent (22%) were PhD students.

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![Level of Education Pie Chart](image)

**Fig. 2 – Level of Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DURATION OF STAY IN FINLAND</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than a year</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 10 years</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.0 Percentage Distribution – Duration of Respondents’ Stay in Finland**
Table 1.0 shows the years spent in Finland by the respondents. Majority of the respondents, sixty-one per cent (61%) had lived in Finland between 1-5 years. Those who had lived in Finland less than a year also made up twenty-one per cent (21%) of the respondents. Those who had lived in Finland for 5-10 years also constituted eighteen percent (18%) of the respondents.

4.2 Nature of Communication Between Ghanaian/Nigerian Students and the Finns

The first objective of this study was to find out the nature of the communication between Ghanaian and Nigerian students and the Finns as well as other nationals. Intercultural communication is basically communication between people of different cultures through language and also understanding each others cultural values. In that regard, the respondents were asked questions to elicit information on their level of Finnish proficiency as that is the main language of the Finns.

Fig. 3 – Percentage Distribution - Level of Finnish Proficiency

The Fig. 3.0 depicts the Finnish proficiency of the respondents. Two (2) respondents being nine per
cent (9%) of the respondents had no knowledge of the Finnish language. Twelve (12) respondents being fifty-two per cent (52%) spoke only basic Finnish. Six were intermediate and made up twenty-six percent (26%) of the respondents whiles thirteen percent (13%) spoke fluent Finnish.

Table 2.0 How Non Finnish-speaking Respondents Communicate with Non-English Speaking Finns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD OF COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign Language</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows the method of communication between the Non-Finnish speaking respondents and non-English speaking Finns. The two respondents who indicated that they have no knowledge of the Finnish Language (in the previous question) are the only ones who responded to this question. One respondent indicated he/she communicated by gestures and other one tried to communicate by speaking English language.

The findings from the table 2, and the figure 3, all show that about half of the respondents spoke basic Finnish. In fact, two respondents had no knowledge of the Finnish Language. The data further shows that those two respondents mostly tried to communicate with the non-English speaking Finns through gestures.

Table 3.0 Percentage Distribution – Respondents’ Close Finnish Friends or Acquaintances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

34
The table 3.0 above explains the percentage of respondents who either have close Finnish friends or have none at all. Majority of the respondents indicated that they had close Finnish friends or acquaintances while forty-eight percent (48%) of the respondents stated that they did not have any Finnish friends. Two of the ‘no’ respondent cited that they do not have Finnish friends but have Chinese, Pakistani and Indian friends.

### Table 4.0 Level of Friendship (Where 1 is not close, 5 is very close)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows the respondents level of closeness to their Finnish friends on a scale of one to five. The twelve (12) respondents who indicated they had Finnish friends in table 4.0 were those who answered this question. Majority, that is seven (7) of the respondents being over fifty-eight per cent (58.34%) placed their level of closeness at 3, another three (3) that is twenty-five per cent (25%) of the respondents rated their level of friendship on a scale of 2. One respondent that is over eight per cent (8.33%) placed his level of friendship on a scale of 1 while other respondent also rated his level of friendship on a scale of 5.

The above data gathered from tables 3 and 4 further explains the nature of communication or relationship between the Nigerian, Ghanaian students and the Finnish nationals. The consequences of their inability to speak Finnish fluently hindered them from making friends with Finnish nationals. It is obvious from the data that the respondents who even claim to have close Finnish friends showed that only one person amongst them could truly describe their friendship as close.
One could conclude from the data collected under the nature of communication between the students and the Finns shows that most of the students do not speak the Finnish language and that was the main reason why they could not relate well with the Finns. The lack of Finnish Language proficiency is due to the fact the international students are taught in English and therefore most of them do not bother to learn the language. However, unlike Finland, international students in some Scandinavian countries, are made to learn the host country’s language as part of the course. It is suggested that to improve their Finnish language proficiency, the students should be made to learn it as part of the course.

4.3 Communication Barriers Such as Racial Abuse, Prejudice, Stereotyping, Negative Perceptions, Misunderstanding of Facial Expressions, Body Language, Gestures and Symbols Encountered by Ghanaian and Nigerian Students and how they Overcame it.

One could easily deduce that since the respondents’ proficiency in Finnish was not good, (resulting in their inability to make friends) it could also result in some intercultural communication problems. Consequently, follow up questions were asked to gather information for the second objective. The second objective was to find out which communication barriers such as racial abuse, prejudice, stereotyping, negative perceptions, misunderstanding of facial expressions, body language, gestures and symbols have the Ghanaian and Nigerian students encountered and how they overcame them.

In the table below respondents were requested to indicate if they had encountered any inter-cultural communication barriers:

**Table 5.0 Percentage Distribution – Inter-cultural Communication Barriers Encountered By Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The percentage of respondents who have encountered some form of cultural barrier during their stay in Finland. Majority, that is sixty-one (61%) indicated that they encountered cultural barriers while thirty-nine (39%) of the respondents indicated that they had experienced a certain degree of cultural barriers. The inter-cultural communication process is full of uncertainties. The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory propounded by Gundykunst (2003) acknowledges that inter-cultural communication or cross cultural communication between people is characterized by a high degree of unpredictability and anxiety. The anxiety and unpredictability alone could lead to mistakes, misinterpretation and misunderstandings. It was obvious that all the respondents had encountered some form of inter-cultural communication barriers.

Moreover, since it had become evident that the respondents had encountered some inter-cultural communication challenges, a follow-up question requested them to indicate the type of challenge(s). Table 6.0 indicates the kinds of cultural barriers encountered by the respondents. About twenty-six per cent (26.08%) indicated that they had problems adjusting to the Finnish way of life. Furthermore, almost twenty-two per cent (21.74%) of the respondents indicated that their inability to speak the Finnish language was also a barrier to communicating with non-English speaking Finns. Over eight per cent (8.69%) of the respondents indicated that they encountered some form of prejudice at some point in time. The following cultural barriers were encountered by one respondent each, that is a little over four per cent (4.35%) in each case: (as presented in the table 6.0):

- Some form of stereotyping, discrimination and racism respectively;
- Some form of prejudice, stereotyping as well as difficulty in speaking Finnish.
- Prejudice, discrimination and racism;
- Have experienced some form of prejudice and stereotyping; and
- Also have problem adjusting to the Finnish way of life as compared to that of their home country;

Additionally, three (3) of the respondents being over thirteen per cent (13.04%) indicated that they encountered difficulty with the Finnish language and stereotyping as well.

**Table 6.0. Percentage Distribution – Types of Cultural Barriers Encountered by Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESPONSES</td>
<td>FREQUENCY</td>
<td>PERCENTAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Finnish way of life</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Finnish way of life,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice &amp; Stereotyping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language, Prejudice &amp; Stereotyping</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language &amp; stereotyping</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice, Discrimination &amp; Racism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice &amp; Stereotyping</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Cognitive Flexibility theory propounded by Brislin & Yoshida (1994:90) posits that attributes like flexibility and open-mindedness towards ideas and changes ultimately lead to success in cross cultural communication. This notwithstanding, once the participants are not inter-culturally competent they could still encounter challenges as seen in the above data.

Elements of communication include both verbal and non-verbal symbols. To throw more light on the challenges they encountered, the study sought to obtain data on misconception the respondents encountered due to non-verbal misunderstandings. Responses from respondents are presented in Table 7.0:

**Table 7.0 Percentage Distribution – Intercultural Misconceptions Experienced by Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gestures</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Language</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial expression</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugging</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7.0 indicates the percentage of intercultural misconception experienced by the respondents. Almost half that is almost forty-eight per cent (47.81%) of the respondents indicated that they have experienced some form of intercultural misconceptions due to difference in gestures in their home country and Finland. Five (5) of the respondents that is almost twenty-two per cent (21.74%) also experienced some form of intercultural misconception due to differences in body language. One respondent each that is a little over four per cent (4.34%) indicated the following intercultural misconceptions encountered in each case (as presented in the table 5.0):

- Eye contact.
- Gestures and body language
- Gestures and handshakes.
- Facial expression and handshake
- Gestures and eye contacts.

Table 7.0 is the graphical presentation of responses to the question on the type of intercultural misconceptions they experienced in the area of non-verbal symbols. Gudykunst (2003) explains that in order to reduce misunderstanding one has to be very observant, being weary of the ‘stranger’ as well as the cultural and communicative difference between the partners involved. On the contrary, one could observe the kind of misconceptions and misinterpretations that respondents experienced. Although, what Gudykunst (2003) proposes is good, it would only work out well when the parties involved are inter-culturally competent or have taken time to study and understand the language and culture and therefore know what to look out for. In a nutshell, one needs to be inter-culturally competent to be able to apply the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory.

Taking cognizance of many qualitative studies, the researcher deliberately made some of the questions open-ended to give the respondents the freedom to express themselves. The respondents were questioned on the types of challenges, misunderstandings or puzzling situations involving differences in culture experienced by respondents (question 13).
Under this question, the findings were analyzed in three main theme areas:

- Puzzling situations like closed culture of some Finns and difficulty in interacting with some Finns as against open culture of respondents

- Misunderstanding due to Language Differences or barrier, inability to communicate with people from different cultures – Due to misunderstanding of (Symbols, facial expression, body language)

- Challenge in accessing the services of some libraries, banks and other social services due to differences in culture, language, communication symbols etc.

Below are some of the respondents’ views under the question 13:
(What challenges, misunderstandings or puzzling situations involving differences in culture have you experienced? Please describe your experience).

- Puzzling situations like closed culture of some Finns, difficulty in interacting with Finns as against open culture of respondents:

From the findings it was realized that most of the participants experienced culture shock due to different types of beliefs and value systems. When entering into a new culture, they needed to deal with different value systems, communication patterns, sign and symbols of social contact, and interpersonal relationship patterns (Hsiao-ping Wu et al., 2015).

One of the value systems that was puzzling according to the findings was sticking to the time or punctuality. Excerpts from the findings: The excerpts below are my own interpretations of the answers given, and not the exact sentences of the respondents, however the main message was maintained or not altered. Some of the vague answers to the open ended questions were paraphrased for the purpose of clarity. For this method it would have been more appropriate to make recordings of interviews, and also transcripts, in order to ensure reliable sources, and avoid subjectivity from our part. However I did my best to elaborate on the answers given in an objective and fair manner.

Excerpt 1:

Some of the students expressed the challenge of keeping to time as demanded by the Finnish culture. In the Ghanaian and Nigerian culture, the system is quite liberal and flexible. It is not out of place to be slightly late to an event (this phenomenon is known as the ‘African time’, slightly late here is ranges from half an hour to an
The respondents struggled to keep to time as demanded in the host country. The researcher also relates perfectly with the struggle to keep to time during the initial stages in Finland. The researcher was late to a few appointments as well as lectures during the early stages of his studies at UEF. It took a while to adjust to the strict adherence to time in Finland as compared to a more relaxed one in his Home country.

Excerpt 2:

A respondent explained that one puzzling cultural differences she experienced was that she was given a parcelled gift by a Finnish friend in the presence of fellow students. Since in her culture it was rude to open the gift in the giver’s presence, she thanked the giver and put it aside with the intention of opening it later in private. However, she was told it was rude in the Finnish culture to do so. The normal thing was for her to open it in the giver’s presence. So the friends encouraged her to open the gift. Initially, it felt strange so she was embarrassed but opened the gift in order not to offend the giver. This shows a clear difference in culture because it is impolite and a bit disrespectful to immediately open a gift in the presence of the person who gave you the gift, a sharp contrast to that in Finland.

Excerpt 3:

Some respondents expressed the views that while the Finnish society seems to be more individualistic, the African society tends to be more group based. Most Africans are in close contact with their extended family, neighbours can visit unannounced for a chat or get together a sharp contrast to that in Finland. This development coupled with some Finns not interacting easily with “strangers” makes it quite difficult for some African students to adjust to this type of settings.

In the second theme area - Misunderstanding due to Language Differences/barrier inability to communicate with people of different cultures – due to misunderstanding of symbols, facial expression and body language) some respondents expressed the following view:

The excerpts below were answers given for question 14(In some of the experiences above, what kind of problems did you identify, why were they problems from your cultural point of view?).
Excerpt I

Inability to communicate with people of different cultures due to misunderstanding of (Symbols, facial expression, body language). Differences in gestures on both sides of the divide (The African students and the Finns) can also lead to difficulties in communication. eg. Some Finns may in some instances exhibit nervousness by smiling and this could be mistaken for being excited. Also certain gestures made with certain parts of the body have different meanings e.g. In Finland, lifting your hand and swinging the fingers back and forth symbolizes “goodbye”, the same gesture in both Nigerian and Ghanaian society means “come” or to call someone.

Excerpt 2

One of the findings was that, most respondents reported that they encountered social isolation and loneliness. Many of the statements in this category were related to difficulties in developing friendships with the Finnish students.

The third theme area - Challenge in accessing the services of library, banks and other social services due to differences in culture, language, communication symbols-yielded the following responses:

Excerpt I

Some respondents lamented that there are instances where they encountered difficulties explaining the exact service they required at various sectors where the operator does not speak English e.g. tax office, hospitals, banks, shops etc due to language barrier. Almost every international student required a service at one point in time at these sectors and therefore this challenge was regular as most of the respondents were not fluent in the Finnish language and at one point in time encountered service providers who did not speak English.

The concluding part of the second objective of the study sought to find adjustment strategies adopted by the students in order to overcome the challenges they encountered (Question 15). Responding to how they overcame the intercultural communication barriers, misunderstanding and misinterpretations, the respondents gave the above responses:

Excerpts from the responses:

Some of the responses show that the respondents tried to explore the new society and culture by making extra effort to be friends with Finnish speaking fellow students in order to improve upon their Finnish proficiency. Some even joined some student organizations to help engage in different campus activities in order to broaden their social networking. These interactions enhanced their intercultural communication
skills and also provided them with opportunities to understand and adjust to the Finnish culture.

Other respondents mentioned that their adjustment strategy to overcome the cultural barriers or challenges was to make an effort to learn and understand the cultural values of the host country.

Most respondents however, explained that they combined all the following: learning the language, the culture of the host country and also making extra effort to improve upon their communication skills.

Once again, in applying the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory here, Gudykunst (2003) proposes that to achieve inter-cultural competence, one has to be observant of the other party’s cultural and communication differences to bridge the gap. As could be seen from the responses, some responded that their success in overcoming the barriers was due to orientation from the University of Eastern Finland (UEF). The rest of the responses included an aspect of learning the host country’s language (Finnish) and culture. It is therefore very important that Ghanaian and Nigeria international students acquaint themselves with basic Finnish language and cultural values to reduce inter-cultural communication problems when they do arrive in Finland.

The study went even further to find out the impact of the challenges on their studies and social lives.

Table 8. Percentage Distribution – How Intercultural Communication barriers affect studies of Respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table 8 above shows that seventeen per cent (17%) of the respondents reported that the communication barriers affected their studies whiles majority eighty-three (83%) also stated that it had no effect on their studies.
Fig. 4.0 also shows that majority, that is sixty-one percent (61%) being fourteen (14) of the respondents stated that the intercultural barriers affected their social life and how they interacted with the Finns and their social life in general. Another thirteen per cent (13%) that is three (3) respondents indicated that it had no effect on their social life whiles twenty-six per cent (26%) making up six (6) respondents, stated that to a certain degree it affected their social life.

The inter-cultural communication barriers did not affect the respondents’ studies because the mode of instruction is English. However, Fig. 4.0 elaborates on the impact of inter-cultural communication challenges on respondents’ social life. As can be seen from the responses, sixty-one percent (61%) indicated that the inter-cultural communication barriers impacted negatively on their social lives.

As a result of tuition being free in Finland, qualified students all over the world could gain admission in most Finnish institutions of higher learning. Based on the above findings, it would go a long way if institutions of higher learning in Finland could include in the curricular few months of compulsory learning of the Finnish Language, cultural values and essential information they need to...
know about Finland. They could also make a lot of Finnish friends. By so doing, respondents would not only earn a degree but they would return to their home countries with the good cultural values they have learnt.

4.4 The institutional policies or programmes implemented to enhance communication skills and intercultural competence.

The third and last objective sought to find institutional policies or programmes that have been implemented to enhance respondents’ communication skills and intercultural competence. Hsiao-ping Wu et al (2015) in an article entitled ‘International Student’s Challenge and Adjustment to College’ explain that international students’ enrollment in higher education in the U.S has expanded considerably in the last decade. Furthermore, in their research they sought to study international students’ experiences in academic and socio cultural settings. The findings revealed that international students dealt with academic challenges, social isolation, and cultural adjustment. However, the positive side is that they enhance the diversity and internationalization of their classrooms, campuses, and communities. Moreover, they add different perspectives in the classroom and enhance the mutual understanding and appreciation of the differences found around the world. Additionally, their contributions have positively influenced the student population on so many different levels including academic prestige, cultural exchange, and financial revenue (for fee paying institutions).

Based on the findings of Hsiao-ping Wu et al (2015) it was concluded that it is beneficial for higher institutions to admit international students. Consequently, it buttressed the reason why this study decided to find out what institutional policies had been put in place for the students to enhance their communication skills and intercultural competence.

More often than not universities provided support services for international students. However, one would wonder about their effectiveness. In that regard, the study sought to find out which institutional policies put in place to help them overcome their challenges. Some of the services provided in some institutions include writing center, counseling center, recreation, orientation etc. to help the students and various student organizations. However, the following are the responses of the participants:

The pie chart Fig.5.0 below indicates that the respondents’ answers to the measures taken by the
The institution (UEF) to improve upon their intercultural communication skills. Majority, that is thirty one percent (31%) indicated that Finnish language classes were organized to aid them. Approximately thirteen percent (13%) also stated that orientation courses were held to help them, then one respondent also stated that it was done through sports whiles about nine percent (9%) indicated that the institution organized intercultural excursions/trips to enhance interaction. Furthermore, thirteen percent (13%) of the respondents also stated that the institutions organized debates and group discussions to enhance intercultural communication. Lastly, about twenty-six percent (26%) of the respondents also indicated they did not receive any institutional support whatsoever and about four percent (4%) failed to answer the question.

The findings from the above questions indicates that, although some level of institutional support was put in place by UEF, it was still not enough. The study went further to ask the respondents to suggest institutional programmes they think would enhance their intercultural competence.
Below are the responses to that question:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizing Finnish languages classes</td>
<td>30.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation Course</td>
<td>13.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural excursions/trips to enhance interaction</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussion/debates</td>
<td>26.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>13.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 6.0 Suggestions to Improve Intercultural Communication between the Respondents and their Finnish Counterparts.**

The pie chart Fig. 6.0 above shows the various responses given by the respondents on action to be taken to improve intercultural communication between the respondents and the Finns. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the respondents suggested organizing of a more intensive or compulsory/special Finnish language lessons for foreign students. Also four percent (4%) stated that both sides should be more open to each other. Majority of the respondents being sixty-one percent (61%) suggested the organization of interculturally diverse programmes to promote intercultural interaction e.g. festivals, fun fair games, debates, excursions, trip and group discussion. Four percent (4%) suggested that students of intercultural studies should be made to research on cultures of their
counterparts from other cultures. However, nine percent (9%) did not respond to this question. The above data gathered from fig. 6.0 shows that there is the need for more to be done. The need for more to be done is confirmed by Hsiao-Ping Wu et al (2105:1) when they posit that “Thus, as demonstrated in this study, having a better understanding of these students’ academic challenges, university faculty and staff can recognize students’ needs and effectively offer supportive campus resources and services. The university needs to be prepared to meet students not only academically but also socially and culturally. This study also suggests that some preparations need to be made by the university that will embrace international students upon their arrival.”
5.1 SUMMARY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate and identify the intercultural communication challenges encountered by the respondents studying at the University of Eastern Finland. The researcher wanted to identify the nature of the communication between the respondents and the Finnish populace. Another was to identify the intercultural communication problems they encountered, how they overcame the challenges as well as identify the nature of curricular elements and institutional policies implemented to enhance communication skills and intercultural competence. The questionnaires were mailed to some of the respondents i.e. both Nigerian and Ghanaian respondents. Majority of the questionnaires were distributed in person to some of the identified respondents. The researcher used descriptive research methodology and survey techniques to collect data from the respondents. Hence a well prepared questionnaire was distributed to the respondents, the questions were nineteen (19) in number. They consisted of both close-ended and open ended questions.

One of the objectives of the study was to examine the nature of communication between the respondents and the Finns. Giles et al (1991) posits that Communication Accommodation Theory enhances communication. They explain that, the theory focuses on linguistic strategies to decrease or increase communicative distances. This theory is confirmed by some of the research findings. The nature of the communication between the respondents and the Finns shows that majority (52%) of the respondents were basic Finnish speakers and only a small percentage (3%) could speak Finnish fluently. This development may have ultimately led to limited inter-cultural relations between the Respondents and the Non English speaking Finns.

Another Objective of this research was to study the curricular elements and institutional policies that were implemented to enhance communication skills as well as intercultural competence. The results indicate that 30.44% of the respondents indicated that Finnish language classes were organized to aid them. About 26.8% also indicated not receiving any form of institutional support. These findings show that more needs to be done in that aspect as well.

The research also sought to document any form of inter cultural communication barriers the respondents may have encountered. The results indicated that each respondent had experienced at least one form of intercultural barrier with Language barrier and the general Finnish way of life...
receiving the highest percentage of 21.7% and 26.8% respectively. The last objective was to establish whether these experiences of the respondents /international students enhances their intercultural communication skills needed to work effectively in the Global market.

Despite the challenges that came with intercultural interactions and the challenges encountered by the respondents per the results of the research, ultimately it is going to lead to a number of benefits. These experiences are going to make them more tolerant and also broaden their horizon, which would make them succeed in any Multi-national company or another jurisdiction.

Hence, one can conclude that the objectives of this research were fulfilled.

**Summary of Findings**

- Majority of the respondents (61%) indicated that they had encountered cultural barriers during their stay, whiles 39% indicated that they had somewhat encountered these barriers.

- The respondents identified the general Finnish way of life, language, prejudice and stereotyping as the major cultural barriers they usually encountered.

- It also became evident that most of the respondents encountered challenges with gestures and body language due to differences in cultures.

- About (8) making 34.79% of the respondents indicated that ,they overcame the communication barriers /misconception by learning the cultural values of the host country whiles others indicated that it was a combination of learning the Finnish language, orientation programmes by the school and also improving their intercultural communication skills.

- From the research conducted, majority (83%) stated that ,the intercultural communication barriers they encountered did not affect their studies in any way.

- The intercultural communication barriers affected the social life and interaction of the respondents with the Finnish populace.

- The percentage of respondents with close Finnish friends was 52% whiles those without close acquaintances where 48%.
• With regards to rating the level of friendship on a scale of 1-5, only 1 out of the 23 respondents had a very close Finnish friend, the rest were somewhat close.

• The respondents (7) that is 30% of the respondents indicated that, the only institutional support they had from the school was the organizing of Finnish classes and another set of respondents (6), making 26.08% of the respondents indicated that that did not receive any form of institutional support.

• The respondents identified misunderstanding due to language barrier, inability to communicate effectively with people from other cultures due to misunderstanding of symbols and facial expressions, “closed culture” of the Finns as opposed to open nature of the respondents and also challenges in accessing the services of banks, hospitals and other social services due to language, cultural and communication symbols as some of the challenges they encountered.

• From the findings of the research, it has become evident that measures are supposed to be put in place to help ease the intercultural communication problems encountered by the international students (respondents).

5.2 DISCUSSION
Since the intake of international students keep increasing each year, it is prudent for the institution to formulate measures to ease these challenges in order to make their stay worthwhile and also provide grounds for learning from other cultures thereby creating a healthy learning and interculturally friendly environment. Comparing the findings on both the Nigerian and Ghanaian students, it became evident that they both shared similar challenges and opinions on ways to overcome them. This is may partly be linked to similarities in cultures and lifestyle between the two countries.

The age, gender and educational level had no impact or effect on the challenges encountered or experiences of the respondents from both countries, they all encountered similar challenges. Another interesting observation from this research also had to do with their duration of stay, which also had no real impact on their challenges and experiences in Finland.

The research also indicates that one of the most challenging barriers of the respondents is the Finnish language, with only 13% being fluent in Finnish. Since the Finnish language is the main language of communication, it makes it difficult to access certain social services like hospitals, banks etc. since not all employees of these organizations speak fluent English. The intercultural
communication barriers with Language barrier being one of the major challenges, also ultimately had an impact on the social interaction between the respondents and their Finnish counterparts with 61% indicating that due to these barriers they could not relate properly with most non-English speaking Finns.

The chain also can be partially linked with only 8.3% of respondents having close Finnish friends. Although some of the respondents blamed the closed or unfriendly nature of some Finns for this development, the language barrier can also not be overlooked when it comes to the ineffective social interaction between the two parties. Therefore when the issue of language barrier is solved, most of the intercultural misconception and stereotyping would be reduced because it would give room for effective communication and socialization as well as learning from each other’s cultures and values.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the recommendations and suggestions made by the respondents included organizing of a more intense and compulsory/special Finnish language classes for foreign students. Language barriers could affect students participation in different events, and cultural understanding. This measure will go a long way to help improve the intercultural communication barriers between the respondents and the Finns.

Another recommendation is organizing more intercultural programmes to promote intercultural interaction e.g. Festivals, fun fairs, debates, excursions, trips and group discussions. The UEF could host the aforementioned programmes to enable international students to become acquainted with the Finnish Language, commonly used slang words, and the social and cultural customs of the Finnish society in order to communicate effectively both in academic and in non-academic situations. This particular recommendation is also crucial to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions both cultures have about each other and would serve as an avenue to bond and learn from each other culture. Finnish students also need to develop intercultural competence to interact with international students.

Students of intercultural studies should be made to research on cultures of their counterpart from other cultures to reduce or diffuse stereotypes/prejudice/misconceptions. This would encourage student research and also broaden their knowledge on each other’s cultures.

A recommendation which would lead to an improved research will have to be the observational side as well as one-on-one interview of the respondents. Due to financial, time and logistical constraints,
it was not possible to add these two as aspects of data collection to the research. However, I believe that a further research into this subject using these two aspects of data collection will lead to a rich and more detailed information. This aspect will reveal personal experiences and other intimate aspects of the research.

Again it is essential to bring to the fore one of the important limitations of this study. The study did not look at variables like motivation, personality, attitude etc which could have a bearing on the findings. It is suggested that future studies could consider looking at these variables.

In conclusion, it can be said that one of the reasons for enrolling international students is to share and also learn from their cultures, therefore the onus lies with the school authorities to benefit from these international students by exploring all means necessary to incorporate certain measures like compulsory Finnish lessons, intercultural debates and games just to aid in achieving this goal of having an effective multicultural environment. This research is very relevant and important because it sought to highlight among others the intercultural communication skills of a particular group of international students from Ghana and Nigeria as well as the communication problems they encountered in their quest for higher education. The research findings revealed important pieces of information which may be useful for policy formulation.
A year abroad programme at the University of Ghana. Available at


Arseculeratne D. & Yazdanifard., R. (2013) Barriers to Cross Cultural Communication and the steps needed to be taken for a MNC to succeed in the Global Market. Available at


http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3211923.stm


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QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS- A CASE STUDY OF GHANAIAN AND NIGERIAN STUDENTS IN FINLAND.

Dear Respondent, this questionnaire is to collect data on Ghanaian and Nigerian students in Finland for the above research purpose only. All information given would be treated as strictly confidential. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. Gender
   a. M    b. F

2. Age
   a. Less than 20     b. 20-30 years    c. 30-50 years   d. 50 and above

3. Level of studies
   a. Bachelor’s Degree  b. Masters        c. PhD
   d. Other

4. Duration of stay in Finland
   a. Less than a year   b. 1-5 years      c. 5-10 years    d. Over 10 years
   e. Other

5. Level of Finnish proficiency
   a. None              b. Basic          c. intermediate  d. very fluent

6. If your level of Finnish proficiency is none, how do you communicate with Finnish who do not speak English
   a. Sign language    b. Gestures       c. symbols

7. Have you encountered any cultural communication barriers during your stay here?
   a. Yes              b. no            c. somewhat
   d. other


8. What are some of the intercultural communication barriers?
   a. Language       b. General Finnish way of life       c. prejudice
   d. stereotyping   e. discrimination       f. racism
   g. other

9. What are some of the intercultural communication misconceptions you have experienced?
   d. Eye contact    e. Hugging       f. Handshake

10. What challenges, misunderstandings or puzzling situations involving differences in culture have you experienced? Please describe your experience.

11. In some of the experiences above, what kind of problems did you identify, why were they problems from your cultural point of view?

12. Did the intercultural communication barriers affect your studies in any way?
   a. Yes       b. No
   c. Other

13. How did you overcome the intercultural communication barriers, misunderstanding/misinterpretations?
   a. By learning the Finnish language       b. Orientation programmes in my school
   c. Improving communication skills       d. Learning the cultural values of host country
   e. All of the above

14. Did it affect the way you interact with other Finnish students and your social life in any way?
   a. yes       b. No       c. somewhat
   d. other
15. Do you have any close Finnish friends or acquaintances?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Other

16. Level of friendship (where 1 is not close and 5 is very close)
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5

17. Approximately how many cultures are represented in your class including yourself?
   a. less than 2
   b. 3 to 5
   c. 6 to 8
   d. 9 to 11
   e. more than 12

18. What institutional support have you had from your school to improve intercultural sensitivity and communication skills?
   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

19. What can be done to improve intercultural communication between Ghanaian, Nigerian students and the Finnish populace/students?
   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………