



17. Cross-Cultural Communication

BVPT-104: English & Communication

Unit 4: Business Communication

Topic: Cross-Cultural Communication - Understanding and Adapting to Cultural Differences in Communication

□ What is Cross-Cultural Communication?

Cross-cultural communication is the process of exchanging information between people from different cultural backgrounds. It becomes crucial in **healthcare and physiotherapy**, where practitioners may interact with:

- Patients from different regions or countries
- Healthcare professionals with diverse cultural beliefs
- International academic or corporate institutions

Understanding cultural differences helps build **trust, empathy, and cooperation**, while avoiding misunderstandings.

□ Why It Matters in Physiotherapy

Scenario	Potential Cultural Impact
A female therapist treating a male patient	Some cultures may expect gender-specific care providers
A patient avoids eye contact	Might be seen as disrespect in one culture but a sign of respect in another
A student in a global webinar	Must understand accent and etiquette variations
Diet/exercise recommendations	May conflict with religious or regional beliefs

□ Key Aspects of Cross-Cultural Communication

1. Verbal Differences

- **Tone and directness:** Some cultures value **direct** talk (e.g., USA), others prefer **indirect and polite** speech (e.g., Japan).
- **Pace and pauses:** Silence may mean **respect** in some cultures, or **discomfort** in others.

□ Example:

- Saying “no” directly may be normal in Western cultures, but avoided in some Asian cultures.

2. Non-Verbal Differences

- **Eye contact:** Seen as confidence in Western cultures, but **rude or aggressive** in some Asian and Middle Eastern cultures.
- **Gestures and touch:** Hand gestures, physical distance, and physical contact norms vary widely.

□ Example:



- The “thumbs up” gesture is positive in some places, offensive in others.

3. Cultural Values

- **Time orientation:**
 - **Monochronic** cultures (Germany, US) value punctuality.
 - **Polychronic** cultures (India, Latin America) may be more flexible.
- **Individualism vs Collectivism:**
 - Western cultures promote independence and “self-care.”
 - Eastern cultures may focus on family involvement and group decisions.

□ How to Adapt in Cross-Cultural Communication

Strategy	What to Do
Be aware, not biased	Avoid making assumptions based on culture. Each patient is unique.
Use simple and clear language	Avoid slang or idioms that may confuse non-native speakers
Ask and clarify	Politely check if the patient understood or has preferences
Be respectful	Don't joke about beliefs, customs, accents, or attire
Use interpreters when needed	For patients with limited English; avoid using children as interpreters
Learn about local norms	Especially useful during internships, international workshops or camps

□ Helpful Phrases for Cultural Sensitivity

- “Please let me know if you have any cultural or religious preferences for your treatment.”
- “I want to ensure you're comfortable with our approach—feel free to share your views.”
- “If I use any term or gesture that feels unfamiliar, do let me know.”

□ Role of Cross-Cultural Communication in Physiotherapy

Context	Application
Patient education	Adjust explanations based on language and literacy level
Consent & confidentiality	Respect beliefs about modesty, touch, or family involvement
International collaboration	Be open to different practices and communication norms

□ Example Situations

1. A physiotherapist explaining exercise to a rural patient may use **visual aids** instead of technical terms.
2. A therapist may ask a female patient if she prefers a female therapist due to **religious reasons**.
3. During an **online international workshop**, students practice speaking slowly and clearly to aid understanding.

□ Self-Check Questions

1. Why is eye contact considered inappropriate in some cultures?
2. How can a physiotherapist show respect for a patient's cultural preferences?
3. Give an example of a miscommunication that could happen in a multicultural clinic.



4. What are 2 ways to make your speech easier to understand for a non-native speaker?

□ Summary

- **Cross-cultural communication** helps you connect better with patients and colleagues from diverse backgrounds.
 - Always aim to be **clear, respectful, non-judgmental**, and flexible.
 - When in doubt, **ask**—never assume.
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AYURVEDBHARATI.ORG