

# Intercultural Communication

Week 2- Understanding Culture and Identity

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# Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Define the concepts of culture and identity.
- Explain the relationship between culture and identity.
- Identify key elements that shape cultural identity
- Describe the process of cultural identity formation.
- Examine how culture influences communication and perception.

# What is Identity ?

- An individual's self-concept is built on cultural, social, and personal identities.
- It refers to the way a person understands, defines, and expresses who they are—both to themselves and to others.
- It is a complex concept shaped by personal, social, and cultural factors.
- Identity is the collection of personal, social, and cultural characteristics that define who a person is and how they see themselves and are recognized by others.

# Types of identity

There are different types of identity and they include:

1. Personal identity (individual traits and personality)
2. Social identity (group membership)
3. Cultural identity (connection to cultural groups)
4. National identity (citizenship and belonging to a nation)

# 1. Personal Identity

- This is how you see yourself as an individual.
- Personal identity is based on people's unique characteristics, which may differ from those of others in their cultural and social groups.

## It includes:

- Personality traits (e.g., introvert/extrovert)
- Values and beliefs
- Goals and aspirations
- Personal experiences

You may identify as a hardworking student, a creative thinker, or a leader.

## 2. Social Identity

- Social identity develops as a consequence of memberships in particular groups.
- This relates to how you are defined by your relationships and social groups.
- The types of groups with which people identify can vary widely and might include perceived similarities due to age, gender, work, religion, ideology, social class, location (neighbourhood, region, and nation) and common interests.

# Social Identity

## Includes

- Family roles (e.g.; sibling, parents)
- Occupation (e.g; teacher, journalist)
- Social groups (friends, clubs, communities)

Example is being a Student as well as a member of a church, or part of a student organization.

### 3. Cultural Identity

Cultural identity refers to a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. It is shaped by shared values, beliefs, norms, traditions, language, and practices.

It answers the question: "Who am I in relation to my culture?"

- It is formed in a process that results from membership in a particular culture, and it involves learning about and accepting the traditions, heritage, language, religion, ancestry, aesthetics, thinking patterns, and social structures of the culture.
- That is, people internalize their beliefs, values, norms, and social practices of their culture and identity with that culture as part of their self-concept.

# Key Elements of Cultural Identity

**a) Values**–Deeply held ideas about what is right or wrong, important or unimportant.

**b) Beliefs**– What people accept as true about life, religion, and society.

- Example: Religious beliefs or spiritual worldviews.

**c) Norms: Social rules that guide acceptable behaviour.**

- Example: Greeting etiquette, dress codes, gender roles.

**d) Language**–A major carrier of culture and identity that shapes how people think and communicate.

- Example: Indigenous languages or national languages.

**e) Traditions and Customs**–Practices passed down through generations.

- Example: Weddings, initiation rites, festivals.

**f) Symbols**– Objects, gestures, or signs that carry cultural meaning.

- Example: Clothing, artifacts, flags, religious symbols.

# Importance of Cultural Identity

- Provides a sense of belonging
- Builds self-esteem and personal identity
- Promotes cultural continuity
- Encourages diversity and multiculturalism
- Strengthens community bonds

# 4. National Identity

**National identity** refers to a shared sense of belonging to a nation.

-It is how individuals identify themselves as members of a particular country, based on common elements such as history, culture, language, values, and symbols.

It answers the question: "**Who are we as a people?**"

## 2. Key Elements of National Identity

- **a) Shared History**
  - Collective memories of past events (e.g., independence struggles, colonial history, wars).
  - These experiences shape national pride and unity.
- **b) Culture**
  - Includes traditions, customs, dress, music, food, and rituals.
  - Culture provides a way of life that people identify with.
  - Example: Traditional dances, cuisines, and ceremonies.

# Key Elements of National Identity cont

## c) Language

- A common language (or languages) fosters communication and unity.
- It is a key symbol of identity and cultural continuity.
- Example: Kiswahili as a unifying language in Kenya.

## d) Values and Beliefs

- Shared principles such as patriotism, democracy, justice, and respect.
- These guide behaviour and national expectations.

## e) National Symbols

- Visible representations of identity: These symbols evoke emotional attachment and pride
  - Flag
  - National anthem
  - Coat of arms
  - National heroes

## f) Territory (Geography)

- A defined physical space (country borders) where citizens belong.
- Landscapes and landmarks also contribute to identity.

# Types of National Identity

## a) Civic National Identity

- Based on shared political values, laws, and citizenship.
- Emphasizes rights, equality, and participation.
- Example: Identifying with a constitution and democratic system.

## b) Ethnic National Identity

- Based on shared ancestry, language, and cultural heritage.
- Strong emotional and historical ties.

## c) Cultural National Identity

- Rooted in shared traditions, religion, and cultural practices.

# Formation of National Identity

National identity develops through:

- **Socialization** – Family, school, and community teaching values
- **Education systems** – Teaching history, civics, and national symbols
- **Media and Communication** – News, films, and digital platforms shaping narratives
- **Political leadership** – Promoting unity and national vision
- **National events** – Holidays, elections, sports

# Importance of National Identity

- Promotes unity and cohesion
- Encourages patriotism and loyalty
- Supports governance and political stability
- Strengthens social integration
- Enhances international recognition and diplomacy

# Cultural Identity Formation

Cultural identity formation is the lifelong process through which individuals develop a sense of belonging to a particular culture. It involves learning, internalizing, and expressing values, beliefs, norms, language, and practices of a cultural group.

**It answers the question "How do I become who I am culturally?"**

It is formed through a process of three stages:

Unexamined Cultural Identity Stage

Cultural Identity Search Stage

Cultural Identity Achievement Stage

# 1. Unexamined Cultural Identity Stage

- This stage is characterized by individuals who are not aware of cultural differences. They do not pay attention to, or are not keen on, the differences between them and others.

## Common indications of this stage include:

- In this stage, one's cultural characteristics are taken for granted, and consequently, there is little interest in exploring cultural issues.
- Individuals accept cultural norms without questioning.
- Identity is shaped mainly by family and immediate environment.
- Example: Young children, for instance, typically lack awareness of cultural differences and the distinguishing characteristics that differentiate one culture from another or a child adopting language, food habits and traditions from parents.

## 2. Cultural Identity Search

Cultural identity search involves exploring and questioning one's culture to learn more about it and understand the implications of membership in it.

Common indications of this stage include

- An increased social and political awareness along with an increased desire to learn more about one's culture.
- An increased degree of talking with family and friends about cultural issues
- Independent reading of relevant sources, enrolling in appropriate courses
- Increased attendance at cultural events such as festivals and museums.
- There may also be an emotional component to this stage, of varying intensity, which involves tension, anger, and perhaps even outrage directed toward other groups.

# 3. Cultural Identity Achievement Stage

- Cultural identity achievement is characterized by a dear, confident acceptance of oneself and an internalization of one's cultural identity.
- Common indications of this stage include
  - Co#
  - People who have developed ways of dealing with stereotypes and discrimination
  - Are aware of the personal meanings of their culture.
  - Individuals consciously accept, reject, or redefine aspects of their culture.
  - A stable and confident cultural identity is formed.

# Agents of Cultural Identity Formation

- a) Family
- b) Education
- c) Peer Groups
- d) Media and Technology
- e) Religion
- f) Community and Society

# Core Elements of Culture in Identity Formation

1. **Values** are deeply held beliefs about what is good, right, and desirable.

Examples: Respect for elders, Community cooperation and Honesty  
Values shape decision-making and behaviour, forming a core part of identity

2. **Beliefs** are ideas that people accept as true about the world.

Examples: Religious beliefs, Cultural myths, Ideas about success or morality  
Beliefs influence how individuals interpret reality and define themselves.

3. **Norms** are the rules and expectations that guide behaviour in society.

Types: Formal norms (laws), Informal norms (customs, etiquette)

Example: Greeting elders respectfully in many African cultures.

Norms shape acceptable behaviour and reinforce group identity.

# Factors Influencing Cultural Identity Formation

- **Globalization** – Exposure to diverse cultures
- **Migration** – Interaction with new cultural environments
- **Language** – Strong determinant of identity
- **Socio-economic status** – Access to cultural resources
- **Political environment** – Policies on culture and identity
- **Historical context** – Colonialism, conflict, or national movements

# Challenges in Cultural Identity Formation

- Cultural confusion or identity crisis
- Discrimination and stereotyping
- Pressure to conform
- Loss of cultural heritage
- Generational differences

# Importance of Cultural Identity Formation

- Shapes self-concept and worldview
- Influences communication and relationships
- Promotes intercultural competence
- Enhances social cohesion and diversity appreciation

# Relationship Between Culture and Identity

## 1. Culture Shapes Identity

- Culture provides:
- Values → guide choices
- Norms → regulate behavior
- Beliefs → shape thinking

Identity is built through these cultural elements.

## 2. Identity Reflects Culture

- Identity is expressed through:
- Language
- Dress
- Food
- Communication styles

# Culture and Identity

## 3. Identity is Dynamic

- Identity changes due to:
- Globalization
- Education
- Media exposure

Individuals develop multiple and evolving identities.

## 4. Culture, Identity, and Communication

- Culture influences communication styles
- Identity affects how messages are:
  - Sent
  - Interpreted
- Indirect communication in collectivist cultures
- Direct communication in individualistic cultures

# Relationship between Cultural Identity and Intercultural Communication Competence

**Cultural Identity** refers to a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture, shaped by:

- Values
- Beliefs
- Norms
- Language
- Traditions

**Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)** is the ability to:

- Communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures
- Understand cultural differences
- Adapt behavior in intercultural contexts

# Relationship of Identity and IC Competence

## a) Cultural Identity Shapes Perception

- Your cultural identity influences how you interpret messages
- It determines your worldview, attitudes, and communication style

## **b. Cultural Identity Influences Communication Behavior**

- Verbal and non-verbal communication styles come from cultural identity
- Includes tone, gestures, eye contact, and politeness norms

**In some cultures, direct eye contact shows confidence; in others, it may be seen as disrespectful.**

## c. ICC Requires Awareness of One's Own Cultural Identity

- You cannot communicate effectively across cultures without understanding your own biases
- Self-awareness is the first step in intercultural competence

"You must know your own culture before understanding others."

# ICC Involves Respecting Other Cultural Identities

- Effective intercultural communication requires:
  - Openness
  - Tolerance
  - Empathy

## This reduces:

- Stereotyping
- Ethnocentrism
- Miscommunication

# Summary

- Cultural identity is the **foundation** of communication
- ICC is the **skill** of interacting across cultures
- Understanding your identity improves ICC
- Respecting others' identities strengthens communication
- Both are **interdependent and evolving**

# Conclusion

The relationship between culture and identity is:

- Deeply interconnected
- Dynamic and evolving
- Shaped by values, beliefs, norms, and socialization

Understanding this relationship helps students:

- Develop intercultural competence
- Appreciate diversity
- Communicate effectively in multicultural environments

The End

Thank you.