

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

WEEK 5  
CULTURAL BIASES

Lecturer Wayumba, Iddah

# Lesson Objectives

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

- ▶ Define the term cultural bias
- ▶ Classify different forms of cultural bias
- ▶ Examine the Indicators and manifestations of cultural bias in society
- ▶ Identify the examples of Cultural Biases
- ▶ Recommend ways of avoiding Cultural biases

# Introduction

Have you ever used the following words to describe behaviours, situations or people?

- ▶ Unpredictable
- ▶ Ambiguous
- ▶ Weird
- ▶ Mysterious
- ▶ Unexplained
- ▶ Exotic
- ▶ Unusual
- ▶ Unfamiliar
- ▶ Curious
- ▶ Odd
- ▶ Strange

# What are cultural biases?

Cultural biases are a tendency to **judge or interpret situations, behaviours or people** based on one's own cultural background, often without considering other perspectives.

The keywords are

- ▶ Judge or interpret
- ▶ Behaviours, situations or people
- ▶ Your Cultural background
- ▶ Without considering other perspectives

# How are biases formed?

## Important Statements

- ❖ It is natural to have biases. We react to the messages we receive in our environment.
- ❖ Biases often lie beneath the surface in our unconscious, which makes it difficult to address, as we are often unaware of them but they can also be conscious.
- ❖ They have an effect on how we make decisions regarding our biases/stereotypes about race, class, sexual orientation, family structure, religion, etc.
- ❖ Cultural biases are formed through socialization and repeated exposure to the beliefs, values, norms and assumptions of the groups we grow up in.

# Characteristics of Cultural Biases

- ▶ 1. Learned
- ▶ 2. Often Unconscious
- ▶ 3. Based on Cultural Norms
- ▶ 4. Judgmental
- ▶ 5. Stereotype-Driven
- ▶ 6. Resistant to Change
- ▶ 7. Influences Communication
- ▶ 8. Can Be Individual or Institutional

# Causes of Cultural Bias

- ▶ a) Socialization
- ▶ b) Limited Exposure to Other Cultures
- ▶ c) Fear of Difference
- ▶ d) Media Influence
- ▶ e) Historical Experiences
- ▶ f) Power and Dominance
- ▶ g) Lack of Intercultural Education
- ▶ h) Language Barriers
- ▶ i) Religious and Ideological Rigidity
- ▶ j) Personal Experience

# Effects of Cultural Biases

## On Individuals

- ▶ Low self-esteem among those who are marginalized
- ▶ Emotional pain, exclusion and humiliation
- ▶ Reduced confidence in participation and expression

## On Communication

- ▶ Misunderstanding and misinterpretation
- ▶ Conflict and mistrust
- ▶ Poor listening and lack of empathy

## On Society

- ▶ Division and social tension
- ▶ Inequality and injustice
- ▶ Discrimination in education, healthcare, employment and leadership

## On Institutions

- ▶ Unfair policies and practices
- ▶ Limited inclusion
- ▶ Weak teamwork in multicultural settings

# Examples of Cultural Bias in Daily Life

- ▶ Laughing at someone's accent
- ▶ Assuming educated people must speak or dress in a certain way
- ▶ Viewing one religion as more moral than others
- ▶ Treating foreign customs as strange or backward
- ▶ Judging people's intelligence based on language fluency
- ▶ Excluding certain groups from decision-making
- ▶ Considering some foods, clothing or greetings as inferior

# 1. Ethnocentrism

- ▶ Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture is the standard against which all other cultures should be judged.
- ▶ It makes people see their own customs, language, religion, dress and values as more normal, correct or superior than those of others.
- ▶ All cultures teach their members the "preferred" ways to respond to the world, which are often labeled as "natural or appropriate." Thus, people generally perceive their own experiences, which are shaped by their own cultural forces, as natural, human and universal.
- ▶ Ethnocentrism is a learned belief in cultural superiority.

# Ethnocentrism indicators

- ▶ Believing one's own way of life is the best
- ▶ Judging other cultural practices as strange or wrong
- ▶ Refusing to accept alternative worldviews
- ▶ Looking down on other people's customs, food, dress or language
- ▶ Assuming cultural difference means inferiority

# Examples

- ▶ Saying that people who do not speak your language are less intelligent
- ▶ Referring to another culture's customs as backward or primitive
- ▶ Believing only your religion or cultural values are civilized
- ▶ Mocking people from other communities because they greet, eat and dress differently

# Recommendations

- ▶ Encourage self-awareness about one's own assumptions
- ▶ Learn about other cultures before judging them
- ▶ Promote intercultural dialogue and exchange
- ▶ Teach learners that cultural difference does not mean cultural weakness
- ▶ Practice respect for multiple ways of living

## 2. Stereotyping

Stereotyping is the act of assigning fixed, oversimplified, and generalized ideas to all members of a cultural group.

Stereotypes are a form of generalization about some group of people. When people stereotype others, they generalise about a group and make assertions about the characteristics of all its members.

Stereotypes ignore individual differences and reduce people to labels.

Categories Include

- ▶ Regions of the world
- ▶ Countries (Kenya, Japan, China, France, Great Britain)
- ▶ Regions within countries; (Northern Indians, Southern Indians, U.S. Midwesterners, U.S. Southerners)
- ▶ Cities (New Yorkers, Parisians, Londoners)
- ▶ Cultures (English, French, Latino, Russian, Serbian, Yoruba, Mestizo, Thai, Navajo)
- ▶ Race (African, Caucasian)

# Indicators

- ▶ Making broad statements about entire groups
- ▶ Assuming all members of one culture behave the same way
- ▶ Judging people before knowing them personally
- ▶ Using repeated labels or clichés about groups
- ▶ Treating individuals based on group assumptions rather than real character

## Examples

- ▶ Saying all Asians are good at mathematics
- ▶ Claiming all Africans are poor
- ▶ Assuming all women from a certain culture are submissive
- ▶ Believing all foreigners are wealthy

# Recommendations

- ▶ Judge people as individuals, not as group categories
- ▶ Challenge general statements about any ethnic or cultural group
- ▶ Encourage direct interaction with diverse people
- ▶ Use accurate and respectful language
- ▶ Teach critical thinking about assumptions and labels

# 3. Prejudice

Prejudice refers to negative attitudes, feelings and opinions toward other people/groups that are based on faulty and inflexible stereotypes.

Prejudiced attitudes include

- ▶ Irrational feelings of dislike and even hatred for certain groups
- ▶ Biased perceptions and beliefs about the group members that are not based on direct experiences
- ▶ Firsthand knowledge and a readiness to behave in negative and unjust ways toward members of the group
- ▶ It exists at the level of feelings and attitudes.

# Indicators

- ▶ Disliking a group without personal knowledge
- ▶ Feeling suspicious or hostile toward cultural outsiders
- ▶ Refusing to associate with certain groups
- ▶ Making quick negative judgments based on identity
- ▶ Showing emotional rejection toward people from other backgrounds

# Examples

- ▶ Disliking someone because they come from another tribe
- ▶ Avoiding a classmate because of their religion
- ▶ Feeling that immigrants are a threat without knowing them
- ▶ Assuming a person from another region is untrustworthy

# Recommendations

- ▶ Encourage empathy and personal reflection
- ▶ Promote contact and cooperation among different groups
- ▶ Teach students to question inherited attitudes
- ▶ Create safe spaces for dialogue
- ▶ Focus on shared humanity and common goals

# 4. Discrimination

Discrimination is the unfair treatment of people because of their culture, ethnicity, race, religion, language, or background.

While prejudice is an attitude, discrimination is the action that results from that attitude.

Discrimination can occur in many forms including:

- ▶ Extremes of segregation and apartheid
- ▶ Biases in the availability of housing, employment, education, economic resources, personal safety and legal protections
- ▶ Unequal treatment of certain individuals solely because of their membership in a particular group.

## Indicators

- ▶ Excluding people from opportunities
- ▶ Denying access to services, jobs or leadership
- ▶ Unequal treatment in schools, hospitals, workplaces or public places
- ▶ Giving preference to one cultural group over another
- ▶ Segregation and exclusion from participation

# Examples

- ▶ Refusing to rent a house to someone from a particular ethnic group
- ▶ Not employing a qualified person because of their accent
- ▶ Excluding a student from group work because of nationality
- ▶ Giving promotions only to people from one cultural community

# Recommendations

- ▶ Enforce fair policies and equal opportunity rules
- ▶ Educate communities on human rights and inclusion
- ▶ Establish systems for reporting unfair treatment
- ▶ Encourage merit-based decisions
- ▶ Train institutions on diversity and anti-discrimination practices

# 5. Racism

- ▶ Racism has been described racism as a tendency to categorise people who are culturally different in terms of their physical traits, such as skin colour, hair colour, and texture, facial structure and eye shape.
- ▶ Racism is a form of bias in which people believe that one race is naturally superior or inferior to another.
- ▶ It can be personal, social, or institutional and often leads to exclusion, injustice and systemic inequality.

## Indicators

- ▶ Judging people negatively because of skin colour or physical features
- ▶ Believing one race is naturally more capable or intelligent
- ▶ Using racial insults or slurs
- ▶ Supporting systems that benefit one racial group over another
- ▶ Excluding people on the basis of race

# Examples

- ▶ Assuming a dark-skinned person is less educated
- ▶ Treating lighter skin as more beautiful or respectable
- ▶ Refusing to work with someone because of race
- ▶ Media repeatedly portraying one race as criminal or dangerous

# Recommendations

- ▶ Promote racial equality and dignity
- ▶ Challenge racist language and behavior immediately
- ▶ Teach inclusive history and anti-racist education
- ▶ Support fair representation in institutions and media
- ▶ Encourage critical reflection on beauty standards, power and privilege

## 6. Religious Bias

- ▶ Religious bias occurs when people judge, exclude, or mistreat others because of their religious beliefs, practices, dress or forms of worship.
- ▶ It often grows out of intolerance and the belief that only one religion deserves respect.

### Indicators

- ▶ Mocking religious practices or clothing
- ▶ Treating members of another religion as morally inferior
- ▶ Refusing to associate with people from different faiths
- ▶ Misrepresenting another religion
- ▶ Excluding others from opportunities because of faith

# Examples

- ▶ Making fun of a person for wearing religious attire
- ▶ Assuming people from another religion are extremists
- ▶ Preventing workers from observing legitimate religious practices
- ▶ Describing another religion as false without respectful understanding

# Recommendations

- ▶ Promote freedom of worship and mutual respect
- ▶ Teach comparative religious understanding carefully
- ▶ Avoid mockery of sacred beliefs or practices
- ▶ Encourage interfaith dialogue
- ▶ Create inclusive spaces where religious diversity is respected

# 7. Linguistic Bias

Linguistic bias is prejudice based on the language a person speaks, their accent, pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary or grammar.

It often causes people to associate language style with intelligence, education or worth.

## Indicators

- ▶ Laughing at accents or pronunciation
- ▶ Assuming non-fluent speakers are unintelligent
- ▶ Ignoring people because of their language difficulty
- ▶ Treating one language as more valuable than others
- ▶ Correcting people harshly in a humiliating way

# Examples

- ▶ Looking down on someone because they speak English with a local accent
- ▶ Assuming a person is uneducated because they mix languages
- ▶ Refusing to listen patiently to a speaker with limited fluency
- ▶ Ranking people socially according to the language they speak

# Recommendations

- ▶ Respect multilingualism and language diversity
- ▶ Focus on meaning, not accent alone
- ▶ Be patient with second-language speakers
- ▶ Avoid mocking pronunciation or grammar mistakes
- ▶ Encourage inclusive communication in classrooms and workplaces

# 8. Gender-Related Cultural Bias

Gender-related cultural bias happens when societies treat people unfairly because of cultural beliefs about what men and women should be, do or become. Though linked to gender, it is reinforced by culture and tradition.

## Indicators

- ▶ Believing leadership is for men only
- ▶ Expecting women or men to behave in rigid traditional ways
- ▶ Undervaluing women's ideas or roles
- ▶ Shaming men or women who do not fit cultural expectations
- ▶ Limiting opportunities based on gender norms

# Examples

- ▶ Saying women should not lead public institutions
- ▶ Assuming men should never express emotion
- ▶ Discouraging girls from studying science because of cultural beliefs
- ▶ Expecting only women to do domestic work regardless of employment status

# Recommendations

- ▶ Promote gender equality in education and leadership
- ▶ Challenge harmful cultural norms respectfully
- ▶ Encourage equal participation at home, school and work
- ▶ Teach that ability is not determined by gender
- ▶ Support policies that protect fairness and inclusion

# 9. Media Cultural Bias

Media cultural bias occurs when television, newspapers, films, social media, and other platforms present certain cultures unfairly, negatively, narrowly, or inaccurately.

Media can reinforce stereotypes and normalize prejudice.

## Indicators

- ▶ One-sided portrayals of certain groups
- ▶ Constant linking of some cultures with crime, poverty, or violence
- ▶ Lack of positive or balanced stories about some communities
- ▶ Repetition of cultural clichés in entertainment and news
- ▶ Exclusion of minority voices from public discussion

# Examples

- ▶ Showing Africa only through hunger, war and disease
- ▶ Presenting Muslims only in relation to terrorism
- ▶ Portraying some ethnic groups as comic, lazy or dangerous
- ▶ Ignoring the achievements of minority communities in mainstream reporting

# Recommendations

- ▶ Promote balanced and ethical media representation
- ▶ Encourage media literacy among audiences
- ▶ Include diverse voices in content production
- ▶ Question repeated negative portrayals
- ▶ Teach students to analyze media critically rather than accept it blindly

# 9. Institutional or Systemic Cultural Bias

Institutional cultural bias exists when the rules, policies, structures, or routines of an institution favour one cultural group while disadvantaging others. This may happen in schools, workplaces, governments, hospitals and legal systems.

## Indicators

- ▶ Policies that ignore cultural diversity
- ▶ Curricula centered on only one worldview
- ▶ Lack of translators or culturally appropriate services
- ▶ Recruitment and promotion patterns favouring one group
- ▶ Rules that unintentionally exclude minorities

# Examples

- ▶ A school teaching only one culture's history as important
- ▶ A hospital failing to consider patients' cultural communication needs
- ▶ A workplace rewarding only one communication style
- ▶ Public services that do not accommodate diverse linguistic communities

# Recommendations

- ▶ Review policies for fairness and inclusion
- ▶ Ensure representation of diverse groups in decision-making
- ▶ Provide culturally responsive services
- ▶ Train staff in diversity and inclusion
- ▶ Develop systems that recognize different cultural needs and realities

# Nationality or Xenophobic Bias

This is bias directed at foreigners, immigrants, refugees or people seen as outsiders to the nation or local community.

- ▶ It is often driven by fear, misinformation or competition over resources.

## Indicators

- ▶ Fear or suspicion of foreigners
- ▶ Blaming outsiders for local problems
- ▶ Social exclusion of immigrants
- ▶ Harsh judgments based on nationality
- ▶ Resistance to integration or cooperation

# Examples

- ▶ Assuming all foreigners take jobs from locals
- ▶ Calling immigrants criminals without evidence
- ▶ Excluding international students from social groups
- ▶ Treating refugees as less deserving of dignity

# Recommendations

- ▶ Provide accurate public education about migration
- ▶ Encourage cross-cultural contact and dialogue
- ▶ Promote humane and fair treatment of foreigners
- ▶ Discourage political and social scapegoating
- ▶ Emphasize common human rights and shared dignity

# 12. Class-Based Cultural Bias

Class-based cultural bias occurs when people judge others by social class, income level, lifestyle, neighbourhood or educational background, often conflating economic status with personal value.

## Indicators

- ▶ Looking down on poor communities
- ▶ Associating wealth with intelligence and morality
- ▶ Shaming people for how they speak, dress or live
- ▶ Ignoring the views of lower-income groups
- ▶ Treating affluent lifestyles as the only sign of success

# Examples

- ▶ Assuming a person from a rural area is less informed
- ▶ Mocking someone's clothing or home environment
- ▶ Believing wealthy people are naturally more competent
- ▶ Excluding poor students from social activities because of status

# Recommendations

- ▶ Promote respect for human dignity across classes
- ▶ Avoid equating wealth with worth
- ▶ Teach empathy and social justice
- ▶ Include diverse social realities in education and policy
- ▶ Create inclusive environments that do not shame poverty

# Recommendations for Improvement

- a) Promote Cultural Awareness
- b) Encourage Intercultural Education
- c) Increase Interaction with Diverse Groups
- d) Practice Active Listening
- e) Challenge Stereotypes
- f) Use Inclusive Language
- g) Encourage Critical Media Literacy
- h) Create Inclusive Policies
- i) Promote Empathy
- j) Support Dialogue and Exchange
- k) Train Leaders and Professionals
- l) Reflect and Unlearn Bias

# How to Reduce Cultural Bias in Communication

- ▶ Respect differences in language and expression
- ▶ Avoid assuming your way is the only correct way
- ▶ Ask questions politely when unsure
- ▶ Clarify meaning instead of jumping to conclusions
- ▶ Appreciate different communication styles
- ▶ Be patient with accents and language differences
- ▶ Focus on understanding before evaluation

# Cultural Bias and Intercultural Communication Competence

- ▶ Intercultural communication competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- ▶ Cultural bias weakens this competence because it blocks openness, respect and understanding.

To become interculturally competent, a person needs:

- ▶ **Knowledge** of cultural differences
- ▶ **Respect** for other worldviews
- ▶ **Openness** to learning
- ▶ **Adaptability** in communication
- ▶ **Empathy** toward others
- ▶ **Critical self-awareness** about personal assumptions

Reducing cultural bias improves intercultural communication because it helps people relate more fairly, respectfully and effectively across cultures.

# Lesson Summary and Conclusion

- ▶ We have seen the various types of Cultural biases and how it affects individuals and cultures.
- ▶ We have also seen how they can be reduced through education, self-reflection, empathy, intercultural interaction, inclusive communication and fair institutional practices.
- ▶ A society that actively addresses cultural bias becomes more just, peaceful and capable of meaningful intercultural communication.

# References

Intercultural communication: A contextual approach. Neuliep, J. W. (2020). (8th ed.). SAGE Publications

Intercultural communication Piller, I. (2025). (3rd ed.). Routledge. (Expected or upcoming edition; check for current release).

Intercultural communication: An advanced resource book for students (5th ed.). Holliday, A., Hyde, M., & Kullman, J. (2021). Routledge.

# The End

▶ Thank you