

Chapter 10

The Influence of Intercultural Communication for Immigrant Traders in Kenyan Informal Urban Markets

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigated the influence of intercultural communication on business ventures for the immigrant traders in one of the Kenyan urban informal market that hosts immigrant traders. The study utilized qualitative methodology and purpose sampling on 22 participants. In-depth interviews were used to generate data that was then analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that language differences between the immigrant and local traders are a fundamental intercultural communication factor that influences the business ventures for immigrant traders in Toi market. The study recommends actualization of cross cultural programmes to anchor the learning of host languages for the immigrant traders and intercultural awareness skills for both immigrant and local traders/host nationals in the Kenyan informal markets. That would ultimately translate to effective intercultural communication, harmonious co-existence and further enhance social economic development that is inherent to today's globalised world.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, there has been increased travelling across cultural boundaries for various reasons such as trade. As trading across cultures continues to flourish, research on intercultural communication in the business arena will remain a relevant concern worth investigation in the academic field towards finding solutions to effective intercultural communication across cultures.

Today's era of globalisation has largely contributed to the emergence of intercultural business environments with people from different cultures doing business together. Intercultural communication takes center stage in intercultural business settings. Therefore, there is need to investigate the influence of intercultural communication in intercultural business contexts towards leveraging on intercultural communication competencies as it plays a pivotal role in intercultural entrepreneurship. Furthermore, with globalisation becoming a near reality, the need to address cultural differences in a bid to increase intercultural awareness is paramount.

Intercultural communication in the business arena is a relevant field for investigation and a lot of literature on intercultural communication in the formal sectors is on record. This is especially so on competencies required for effective intercultural interaction (Ting-Toomey, 1999; Gudykunst, 2005). However there are limited studies, if any, on intercultural communication for immigrant traders in the informal market sectors.

The informal sector provides economic opportunities to majority of people in developing countries. For Kenya, majority of the immigrant traders come from East African countries due to its strategic location that has made it a transit country for goods especially to its landlocked neighbours. It is touted as a regional hub in Eastern Africa (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2015). On this premise, intercultural communication takes place in the Kenyan business environments and especially in the informal sector where most of the immigrants from East African regions penetrate. As such, research on intercultural communication in the Kenyan informal sector is paramount towards investigating the intercultural barriers that may hinder effective regional economic activities amongst immigrant and local traders/host nationals in Kenyan informal business environments. Should this be left to chance, the consequences would not only stifle economic growth but would also lead to intercultural conflicts such as prejudice, stereotype, ethnocentrism and racism as cited by Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2010). It is against this backdrop that the present study attempted to investigate the influence of intercultural communication on business ventures for the immigrant traders doing business activities amongst local traders/host nationals in one Kenyan urban informal market. Recognising cultural differences that may hinder effective intercultural communication for traders from different cultural background is fundamental towards finding solutions that would

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