

Culture Shock Among Missionaries in The Diocese of Cachoeiro De Itapemirim-Espirito Santo, Brazil

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ABSTRACT:

The term “culture shock” refers to the adjustment that occurs when one is exposed to a culture that is distinct from their own. This study examines the culture shock that missionaries who serve in the Diocese of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim encounter. The objective of this research was to explore the causes of culture shock. Mixed research method (qualitative and quantitative) approach specifically embedded design was used. The key findings showed that although missionaries were generally satisfied with their missionary experience, there were areas which created challenges for the missionaries. Different expectations about the culture, along with challenges settling into a new community impacted on feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction experienced due to culture shock. Food and Portuguese language challenges were the most prominent components of the causes of culture shock experienced by the missionaries. Aspects of culture shock such as language and food or facial expressions were noted as tensions affecting the mission experience for the missionaries. The causes of culture shock were experienced to some degree by all missionaries in this study.

Keywords: Culture, Culture shock, Missionaries, Missionary experience, Language, Food

INTRODUCTION

In daily life, every human being has habits that describe their interaction with their social environment. These habits are formed due to external influences, such as living habits, or self-habitation brought from one’s origin, cultural background, geographical conditions of the home environment, new place or environment, and the development of the times (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2020).

Culture contains the order of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religions, time, roles, spatial relations, the concept of the universe, material objects, and possessions that are acquired by large groups of people from generation to generation through individual and group efforts (Mulyana, 2010). When someone gets to know a new culture or a foreign culture, he/she may lose the “cultural clue” that he/she has had before. Like a fish that comes out of the water, someone who enters a new culture adjusts to the new environment in which he/she lives. In this adjustment process, individuals usually experience culture shock.

The term culture shock was first mentioned by Kalvero Oberg in 1960. Annie J., and Pragya K. (2019) say it is also known as “culture adjustment stress”. Culture shock can be referred to as a condition arising out of migration of people from a familiar culture to an unfamiliar culture resulting in distress or disorientation or a feeling of discomfort as the result of culture contact. A Culture shock is common phenomena in students, tourists, employees, missionaries or persons involved in any other work that requires frequent migration. Culture shock requires immediate attention as it can lead to serious consequences.

Culture shock is an interesting subject of study for it is having different meanings and different experiences for different people. A wide variation is seen regarding the perceptions of different people to different cultures. People migrating from different parts try different ways to adapt to different cultural environments. Culture shock may be referred to as an occupational disease of people who have recently moved to a different culture (Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock is “the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone when they are suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life or set of attitudes” (Lexico, 2019).

Culture shock is a concept which explains the disconnect between expectation and reality which can be hard to cope with (Cummins, Catling, Hogan & Homer, 2007). Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping and Todman (2008) suggested that “the notion of culture shock has been transformed into contact-induced stress accompanied by skill deficits that can be managed”. This can be seen in the challenges the missionaries face because they are not aware of the social norms in the host country. Cultural nuances, coupled with a second language, and serving in a new environment can impede a missionary’s ability to acclimatise to a new environment. Feelings of culture shock have been described as stresses related to attempts to achieve psychological adaptation – loss of role, friends, and prized possessions; fear of rejection by the members of the new culture; confusion in the attempts to forge a role in the new culture; anxiety or disgust in response to cultural differences; and general feelings of helplessness, including confusion, depression, and frustration (Pyvis & Chapman, 2005 cited in Egenes, 2012).

“When two lines or colours cross in art, a new image is created that is greater than its parts. But when two cultures cross, the nexus is often a homeless land with its children feeling less than whole” (Shannon, 1988). This homelessness is what Shannon refers to as Culture Shock. For Pedersen (1995), Culture shock is the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment. This psychological construct of culture shock has been used to describe the adjustment process in its emotional, psychological, behavioural, cognitive, and physiological impact on individuals. In a multicultural context, culture shock is a more or less sudden immersion into a nonspecific state of uncertainty where the individuals are not certain what is expected of them or of what they can expect from the persons around them.

In recent studies, culture shock is applied to any new experience where a role adaptation and a new layer of identity of an individual is required in purpose to adapt into a new social system where previous learning of the individual does not apply any longer. This process is also accompanied by re-evaluation of one’s own culture as well as re-evaluation of the new host one. “A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviours and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981).

The problem is that missionaries are living in their home country, then relocating and adjusting to another country. These transitions can be problematic for missionaries especially to adapt to the new reality of life. The problem can be strong to every individual missionary depending on his or her adaptability level. There can be challenges with learning new language, adjusting to new food and friend circles and struggles with adjusting to new social expectations (Grych & et al., 1992). It is not until one spends significant time in the new culture that they are able to dig deeper to understand the common humanity, language, food, values, beliefs, and meaning of life for the culture.

Hence this study has both theoretical and practical importance. The awareness and perception on causes of Culture Shock based on the results of the study would highlight the importance of Culture Shock and help missionaries to adopt measures to mitigate the effect of this shock. The study may also be useful for the missionaries to identify the factors leading to Culture Shock and provide necessary help to missionaries to adjust during the period of Culture Shock.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this research was to explore the causes of culture shock. The term cultural shock was

introduced firstly in 1958 to describe the chaotic emotions of a person living in a new environment (Shieh, 2014) that experiences maladjustment that encompassed psychology, emotions, interpersonal relationships. Those who were in cultural shock condition felt a pressure to adapt to their current environmental demands such as school, work, and society in general. Oberg, an anthropologist, mentioned in 1960 that the cultural shock was a symptom and the process of adapting to a new and different culture (Naeem, et al. 2015).

Oberg wrote that people who worked or studied in other cultural settings encountered some external problems. Some of them were different language, interpersonal communication, politics, mentality, religion, education system, food, environmental concern, social responsibility and immigration policies. According to Griffin & Pustay in Johansen the basic causes of culture shock was divided into five elements. They are social structure, language, communication, religion, and values and attitudes. The interaction of these elements affects the local environment in which the missionaries operate. You feel like fish out of water, as you lose familiar surroundings. You cannot find the familiar signs and symbols of everyday communication. You feel like acting a role in a play in which everyone, but you have a script (Kohut & Baxter, 1987).

This experience is unpleasant and shocking to the missionaries. Their expectation did not match to the reality at hand. In this situation, they generated a feeling of helplessness (Rajasekar & Renand. 2013). They did need time to adjust to the unfamiliar environment.

Language

According to Sapir in Riyanti, “language is a symbolic guide to culture.” Language is most important element in cultures. Hofstede pointed out in Baier, “Language is the most clearly recognizable part of culture.” Language can describe someone’s culture by their language. Language was a tool for communication to each other and become as connection among cultures in the world. On the other side, language sometime can be a border for people in different cultures, because every culture commonly has their own languages for communicating. Language can allow people to distinguish themselves from others and maintain group or cultural boundaries and solidarity.

Language is needed for any kind of communication, even people with speech impairments communicate with sign language and brail. Communication becomes difficult in situations where people do not understand each other’s language. The inability to communicate using a language is known as language barrier to communication. Language barriers are the most common communication barriers which cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations between people. If the speaker and receiver do not use same language and words, there is no meaning to the communication. Not using the words that other person understands makes the communication ineffective and prevents message from being conveyed.

The most significant cause of culture shock is immersion in a new language. If you don’t have a strong grasp of the language before moving to a new place, the effect will be particularly acute. An inability to understand what people are saying around you, read signs or even negotiate grocery shopping can leave you feeling isolated and stressed. Even if you do learn the basics of your new language before moving, the sudden wave of new vocabulary can be overwhelming. This is doubly true if you don’t have a strong support network or if you’re starting a mission experience.

Remember to be kind to yourself and give yourself time to pick up the local dialect. Language learning takes time and effort, but the rewards are immense. According to Hofstede (1984) language is considered as an important part of the culture by the fact that it can be learned and not inherited.

Language as a cause of culture shock is also known as “language stress, language acculturation anxiety and second foreign language anxiety”. Second foreign language anxiety can be defined as a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system

(Stephen H. Miller, 2008)”.

Interpersonal Communication (body language, facial expressions)

Interpersonal communication looks at a variety of elements that contribute to the interpersonal communication experience. Both quantitative/social scientific methods and qualitative methods are used to explore interpersonal communication. Additionally, a biological and physiological perspective on interpersonal communication is a growing field. Interpersonal communication includes concepts like, personality, knowledge structures and social interaction, language, nonverbal signals, emotion experience and expression, supportive communication, social networks and the life of relationships, influence, conflict, computer-mediated communication, interpersonal skills, interpersonal communication in the mission and intercultural perspectives on interpersonal communication.

Effective interpersonal relationships can support individual psychological aspects. Moreover, intense and quality interactions can engender self-confidence; consequently, it can bolster individuals to make significant decisions in their lives. Additionally, it can stimulate individuals to solve problems

Politics

A country’s political decisions and politics play a very significant role as a factor leading to culture shock. The governments laws regarding missionaries influences the lives of those coming from other countries.

Mentality (mental attitude)

A habitual or characteristic mental attitude that determines how one will interpret and respond to situations. The mental attitude of each person plays an important role in determining the extend of culture shock that affects the individual.

Religion

Religion is an important aspect of most societies. According Ember and Ember in Baier, “Religion can be defined as any set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices pertaining to supernatural power (Stefanie, 2018).” It affects the ways which members of a society relate to each other and to outsiders. Religions are also vital to a culture. Religion is defined as a set of beliefs, practices, and moral claims, rituals, and religious laws. The religious sentiments of each individual differs and this is a significant factor which leads to culture shock in individuals exposed to a different culture.

Education System

Missionaries working in the education sector have a difficult time adjusting to the local education systems when they begin to settle into their new environment. It is a significant factor that contributes to Culture shock.

Food

Traveling overseas means you are unlikely to find the exact ingredients you wanted in the shops anymore. Even things that are labeled the same may taste different. Before you know it, you may find that you really miss the food back home. The most obvious aspect present is the daily diet, especially on food, “Changes in weight may indicate that a person is experiencing culture shock”. (Barker, 2012) at the beginning of their new life, they will not eat anything or eat less than before and then they will think these sorts of food do not suit their taste. Many missionaries in a foreign country would not like the western food, not only expensive but also not healthy, in they will cook some various of vegetables or soup eating with rice, this is their diet

habit. Because they cannot get their ideal diet, they will extremely feel homesick. At the beginning of entering a new environment, they cannot find their native country's stores to purchase their domestic food, the price of food maybe higher than their country, so they eat less and usually feel hungry and eager to come back home to enjoy a great fancy dinner with their family members.

Environmental Concerns

A serious threat to human beings and their environment is the continuous and accelerating overuse and destruction of natural resources. Bearing this in mind, it is unfortunate that efforts to permanently change people's environmentally destructive behaviour through interventions has typically not been met with success. A necessary condition may be an increase in environmental concern and knowledge about the effects and consequences of the ongoing environmental deterioration for future generations. Factors affecting behaviour appear to be knowledge, internal locus of control (positive control beliefs), personal responsibility, and perceived threats to personal health. All these are causes for culture shock

Social Responsibility

When missionaries are appointed to another country it is always a mixed feeling, they are extremely excited about their famous culture, or the values and goals shared by everyone in the home country. Being a missionary is their top priority; they know that being a missionary affect everything they do, especially when it comes to maintaining social responsibility. Any change in these values may be a cause for culture shock.

Immigration Policies

The immigration policies of a country plays an important role in the culture shock of those from other countries.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted mixed methods approach specifically embedded design. This study targeted the missionaries in the diocese of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim. The total number of the missionaries are 15 in the diocese. For the collection of quantitative data, "Measurement of culture shock tool Adapted from Mumford, D.B. (1998)". For the collection of qualitative data interviews were done to guide the result. All the 15 missionaries also participated in the interview. The quantitative data was collected and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 16) while qualitative data was analysed using content analysis.

FINDINGS

The demographic analysis consists of gender, educational level, age group and length of stay as shown in table1.0

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Criteria	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	5	33.3
Female	10	66.7
Education Level		
Bachelors	8	53.3

Masters	4	26.7
Doctorate	3	20.0
Age distribution		
30-39	3	20.0
40-49	2	13.3
50-59	5	33.3
60-69	5	33.3
Length of Stay		
Less than 6months	5	33.3
6 months -1year	2	13.3
1 year -2years	5	33.3
More than 2 years	3	20.0

Concerning the gender of the participants it shows that there were more females than males. On the education level, the data shows normal distribution of percentages of people with bachelors, masters, and doctorate. The age distribution of the respondents is interpreted as majority of the respondents (79.9%) are 40 years and above. Considering the length of stay, a little more than half of the respondents (53%) have worked as missionaries in the Diocese of Cachoeiro De Itapemirim for more than a year. This shows that an average missionary have had enough experience in the Brazilian culture.

Mean Scores of Culture Shock Causes

Table 2. Culture shock Causes.

		Statistics									
		valuesandbell eves	food	interpersonal communicati on	politics	religion	mentality	imigrationpoli cies	language	environment concern	socialrespon sibility
N	Valid	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	1.40	1.47	1.33	.47	.87	1.40	.93	1.53	.80	1.33
	Std. Deviation	.910	.640	.724	.640	.834	.632	.884	.640	.775	.900
	Variance	.829	.410	.524	.410	.695	.400	.781	.410	.600	.810

The questionnaire used 3 Likert scale in the level of (0=Not at all, 1=Occasionally and 2=Most of the time). In this study, we can conclude that, the six causes of culture shock (language, food, values and believes, mentality, interpersonal communication and social responsibility) having a mean of 1 and above can be considered to be more frequent causes other causes such as (politics, religion, immigration policies and environment concern) which have a mean less than 1 have little impact on the missionaries.

Most of the participants showed that there were difficulties during their stay in the Diocese of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim because of the language barrier, as mentioned below,

“There was a problem such as miscommunication, people asked me something then I answered differently” (Missionary 3, Male, 14th March 2023). Missionary 3 was 39 struggling with the language, because he could not speak Portuguese fluently, then he had a lot of miscommunication while he spoke.

Besides, missionary 8 said,

Of course, there was language difficulty. For example, when I did a presentation in church, it was difficult for me to speak fluently in the church, then my superiors were angry at me and they said, ‘we are not in

Turkey'. If I spoke in front of people, I got nervous, and then it became more difficult to arrange grammar (Male, 14th March 2023).

Missionary 8 had difficulty in speaking in public, then he became nervous and spoke accidentally in his native language.

Missionary 1 also stated, "There was a language barrier because of the way of speaking and the accent. So, to change English into Portuguese, it was quite difficult too" (Missionary 1, Female, 14th March 2023).

While Missionary 10 felt very uncomfortable when he interacted with the Christians, because of the language barrier. As he said "The language was very difficult for me as a missionary. I became very awkward when I talked to the Christians, I became afraid, because I did not know how to say something" (Missionary 10, Male, 14th March 2023).

In contrast missionary 2, he had no problem with the language barrier, because he learnt before coming for the mission and he says, "I took three months in a language school in my home country before coming for mission" (Missionary 2, Male, 14th March 2023).

The other cause of culture shock was found to be food problems. Most of the participants had difficulty with the food in the host culture. For instance, Missionary 9 felt trouble by finding food that suits his taste, and it proved by his statement, "The worst problem was about the food, every day I was in dilemma of deciding what to eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and when I joined others for any meal the dilemma of using the fork or attacking with the hand usually came" (Missionary 9, Male, 14th March 2023).

Missionary 4 also admitted feeling difficult in finding food at first, because he still prefers Malaysian cuisine as he said, "That was the biggest problem, it was quite a big problem for me because I still prefer Malaysian dishes, so I needed to take time to adjust with the local food because, for the first time being here, I need to adjust to the local food" (Missionary 4, Male, 14th March 2023)..

Similar to Missionary 6, she found it difficult to find the food that is suitable for her taste. She said that,

I do not like Brazilian food since it was spicy and made her sick, for the first time, the food was difficult for me, it did not suit my taste because Brazilian food is spicy, been here for a short time, with time I will get used to it, and also at times the food made me sick (Missionary 6, Female, 14th March 2023).

It was equally difficult to understand the values and beliefs of the host country. This made missionary 15 to say, "in a country where they are over 70% Christians, why is it that there is a lot of divorce and separation in the Christian families (Missionary 15, Female, 14th March 2023). He could not reconcile the higher percentage of Christians and the higher rate of divorce and separation.

The mentality and the attitude of the missionaries played a big role in culture shock. When something happened how do they interpret it. Missionary 13 said, "I always remain positive in the daily occurrences so as to find meaning in them" (Missionary 13, Male, 14th March 2023).

Interpersonal communication is the process of exchange of information, ideas and feelings between two or more people through verbal or non-verbal methods. Since the missionaries are adapting to the culture and learning the language. This becomes a challenge as missionary 10 says, "I cannot speak well in Portuguese and this makes it hard for me to express my ideas and feelings to the people I serve" (Missionary 13, Male, 14th March 2023).

It is normal for persons to mingle with other people. This is called social responsibility. But for the missionaries arriving in a host country it may be hard because of fear of being misled. Missionary 9 said, "it took me a lot of time to trust the natives" (Missionary 9, Male, 14th March 2023).

Being missionaries and foreigner's national politics had some effects on the missionaries since some could not renew their residence permits due to international relations between the countries.

Missionary 14 said, "Am not sure whether I will continue serving in this country since it has become so hard and expensive for me to renew my residence permit" (Missionary 14, Male, 14th March 2023).

The missionaries were confronted with the reality of the religion. Being the same Roman Catholic Church. The host country has a lot of devotions. Missionary 7 says, "one wonders if priority is given to the liturgical prayers or devotions" (Missionary 7, Female, 14th March 2023).

The immigration policies were not so much complicated, and this made most of the missionaries to feel at home since they were not being harassed by the migration officers. "It is so fair that they give a lot of days as they prepare the residential permits" (Missionary 15, Male, 14th March 2023).

Many of the missionaries were baffled with the cleanliness of the streets. While a few took note on environmental concern on the disposition of wastes. "waste management is an issue for many municipalities and cities" (Missionary 4, Male, 14th March 2023).

DISCUSSION

From the results of this study, it can be seen that the major causes of culture shock to the missionaries in the Diocese of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim are Language (1.53), food (1.47), values and believes (1.40), mentality (1.40), interpersonal communication (1.33) and social responsibility (1.33). The other causes like politics (0.47), religion (0.87), immigration policies (0.93) and environment concern (0.80) had little impact on the missionaries. Language being a key to communication and socializing this is confirmed by what Vishnyakova & Vishnyakova (2022) said,

Language is needed for any kind of communication, even people with speech impairments communicate with sign language and brail. Communication becomes difficult in situations where people do not understand each other's language. The inability to communicate using a language is known as language barrier to communication. Language barriers are the most common communication barriers which cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations between people. If the speaker and receiver do not use same language and words, there is no meaning to the communication. Not using the words that other person understands makes the communication ineffective and prevents message from being conveyed.

This was supported by what Missionary10 felt when he interacted with the Christians, because of the language barrier. As he said "The language was very difficult for me as a missionary. I became very awkward when I talked to the Christians, I became afraid, because I did not know how to say something" (Missionary 10, Male, 14th March 2023).

In their research study, Rajasekar & Renand (2013) found that most of the respondents were interested and influenced by tradition and religion issues. Whereas, language or food conditions weren't an issue. However, in this research language and food were perceived as highest causes of culture shock. This may refer to respondents' personality in the first place and the environment or the nature of the host culture.

Second, food was found to be the second cause of culture shock as expressed by the participants who had difficulty with the food in the host culture. For instance, Missionary 9 felt trouble by finding food that suits his taste, and it proved by his statement, "The worst problem was about the food, every day I was in dilemma of deciding what to eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and when I joined others for any meal the dilemma of using the fork or attacking with the hand usually came" (Missionary 9, Male, 14th March 2023). This is true since food is part of the culture and since cultures are different hence the food has to be different too.

Food is seen more than just a means of survival. According to Vatika (2018) food is considered to be multidimensional, as something that shapes us, our identities, and our cultures and in the end, our society. Just as different clothes signify different things example the white coat a doctor, the uniform of police officer or army personnel, food also transmits a meaning. But the meaning varies from culture to culture. Furthermore, food could not be viewed as a trope if it did not signify a meaning of something to begin with, for example: tomato, basil and mozzarella cheese on a pizza signify a taste of Italy. Culture also plays a role in food-related etiquette. People in Western societies may refer to food-related etiquette as table manners, a phrase that illustrates the cultural expectation of eating food or meals at a table. Some people eat with forks and spoons; more people use fingers or chopsticks. However, utensil choice is much more complicated than choosing chopsticks, fingers, or flatware.

In regard to the causes of culture shock, it can be concluded that different missionaries had different rates of experiencing culture shock. The differences were that the causes were felt differently among missionaries. The study reports that the highest cause of culture shock is language followed by food.

While everyone goes through culture shock to some degree, it's important to acknowledge that culture shock affects everyone differently and on different timelines. Being patient and kind to oneself as you work through culture shock and try not to compare your experience to those of your peers. Lastly, culture shock is not linear. You may go through two phases, then return to an earlier phase – culture shock is more of an ongoing cycle with back and forths as opposed to a linear process with a destination.

CONCLUSION

This research study was done to highlight the causes of culture shock among the religious in the diocese of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim. In general, elements such as language, food, values and beliefs, mentality, interpersonal communication, social responsibility, politics, religion, immigration policies and environment concern reflect how missionaries perceive the host culture. Referring to study findings, the causes of culture shock varied among the missionaries.

The results of this study show that missionaries experience a variety of causes of culture shock, particularly food and language related challenges which affect the pastoral experience of the missionaries. Providing clear, current information about food and living costs pre-arrival would help alleviate the gaps in the missionaries' experience on arrival in the mission land. Portuguese language is a key cause of culture shock evident in the study, which suggests that Portuguese language testing should be part of preparatory measures before living one's country to the host country.

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