

“AM I BEING RUDE”: EXPLORING INDONESIAN STUDENTS’ INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN INNER CIRCLE COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Studies in Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has been extensively investigated by numerous experts in the last decade. Some models and approaches have been constructed to the purposes of developing individuals’ competency in intercultural communication context. However, some problems occurred due to cultural discrepancy. The purpose of this study is to explore strategies being used by Indonesian postgraduates’ students who were undertaking their master and doctoral programs in English speaking countries to be inter-culturally and communicatively competent. Interviews session (adopted from Fantini’s conceptual framework) with sixteen Indonesian students have been conducted to scrutinise their personal experienced and awareness in intercultural communication setting. Despite the fact that the existences of cultural diversity in inner circle countries, Indonesian students have attempted to exposure more in intercultural interaction. They converged themselves with other international students as well as with the domestic students in the international community. From a critical perspective, this study suggested that Indonesian students should attempt to shift out from their ‘very own’ circle. Equally significant, to be more open to initiate deeper conversation and involve in a more interactive, intercultural communication settings, with other students from different countries.

Keywords: *Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), Cultural Discrepancy, Indonesian Students, International Students, Inner Circle*

I INTRODUCTION

Globalization and mobility have increased the internationalization of higher educational institutions. More and more people worldwide are choosing to attend university overseas (Bennell, 2020), particularly in inner-circle countries (where English is used as L1) for various reasons. Their desire to gain professional exposure in an international setting (Ou & Gu, 2020), improve their global employability (Fakunle & Higson, 2021), and expand their networking collaboration (Alvarez Valencia & Fernández Benavides, 2019) cannot be curtailed. Approximately 3.3 million students have decided to pursue study abroad, according to the OECD's (2017) statistics. As a result, the university has evolved into the ideal paradigm of a multicultural atmosphere; individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and languages participated in a variety of social activities which collectively form one global society. This is aligned with Deardorff and Jones (2012), who claim that one of the university's purposes is to equip international students with the skills required to live and work in a globalized society.

Students in higher education institutions are expected to have strong communication skills and positive interactions with international and domestic students (Rauschert & Byram, 2018). Notwithstanding, because cultural differences and misunderstandings frequently create barriers to intercultural communication, the ability to communicate successfully in an intercultural context has become a critical skill for international students, including Indonesian students who study in international colleges or universities (Leong, 2015; McKenzie & Baldassar, 2017). Furthermore, Ribeiro (2016) argues that higher education must reflect the transforming nature of society and the workplace. In this situation, students must develop intercultural awareness and communicative skills to live and function as a knowledgeable intercultural individual in a multicultural society.

In essence, students who enrolled in tertiary institutions must possess a solid grasp of intercultural communication. International students are supposed to congregate in a 'global village' to survive (Thomas & Inkson, 2017). Given the extent to which students from many cultural backgrounds have engaged in inner circle nations, there is a need for a complete understanding of students' voices. Interestingly, the existence of various prominent scholarships, such as LPDP (Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education), Australia Awards, Chevening, and Fulbright, has resulted in an increase in the number of Indonesian students studying in inner-circle nations in recent years.

Due to the extensive examination of the theoretical framework for intercultural competence, several alternative terms of intercultural competence have emerged, including global competence, transnational competence, cross-cultural awareness, transcultural communication, multidialectical

competence, and metacultural competence, depending on the context, discipline, and approach (see Fantini, 2006; Sharifian, 2013). As a result, scholars have developed and broadened many definitions and descriptions of intercultural competence. Ruben (1976), Spitzberg (1983), and Byram (1997), for example, focused on communication contexts and behavioural approaches that demonstrate how individuals must have a strong personification ability to communicate effectively and represent appropriate behaviour when conversing with other interlocutors. Bennett (1993), on the other hand, proposed a 'dynamic model' to explain how individuals deal with cultural differences during ethnorelative stages (denial, defense, and minimization).

In a similar vein to Bennett's definition, interculturalists such as Chen and Starosta (1996) defined 'cultural sensitivity' as an individual's capacity to recognize and respect cultural dissimilarities. Additionally, intercultural educators such as Van der Zee and Brinkmann (2004) and academics such as Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) have defined IC in cultural empathy, interpersonal skills, and cultural insecurity. Fantini (2006) defined intercultural competence in a broader sense as the needed competencies to perform responsibly and successfully during intercultural encounters. However, these overviews of ICC models focus exclusively on the criteria for evaluating the research results.

Sharifian (2013), in a more recent proposal to the ICC, pushed the concept of 'metacultural competence' as a means of 'negotiating and participating' during the process of intercultural communication. Essentially, this concept encompasses three critical components: knowledge of cultural variance, explanation, and negotiation (Sharifian, 2013). Additionally, this concept was applied in a recent study conducted by Xu (2017) to develop the metacultural writing competency of international students who participate in online debate settings. To be sure, the research findings had significant implications for English Language Teaching, particularly in e-learning environments.

Despite the fact that competency in intercultural communication encompasses a variety of words, ideas, models, and techniques that have resulted in a diversity of evaluation methods. Indeed, from culturally diverse face-to-face engagement to online learning, developing the necessary abilities for intercultural competence is a challenging task. In recent years, the study of intercultural communication competency has flourished in various professions and segments of society, including multinational corporations, military training, health services, and educational institutions. Particularly for international students who are heavily involved with other intercultural speakers (also known as global citizens), including Indonesian students in this context.

II MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this study, which drew heavily on the works of Fantini (2006, 2018, 2020), was to explore the techniques employed by Indonesian postgraduate students when confronted with intercultural interactions in inner circle nations especially in this context i.e. United States, England, Australia where the participants have spent some time undertaking their educational. This study is primarily prompted to evaluate the competency of Indonesian students in an intercultural communication context. Significantly, to gain and explore insights into what may have gone wrong and what alternative options might be incorporated into the pre-departure training curriculum prior to sending students abroad. In this scenario, this research paper seeks to identify potential communication hurdles among Indonesian postgraduates, international students from other countries and their domestic peers enrolled in English-medium universities as well as international community where English is the main tool of communication. Understanding the causes and types of communication barriers among individuals involved in a global context is of particularly importance as to avoid misunderstanding and miscommunication. In addition, the study aims to discuss the strategies employed by Indonesian postgraduates to overcome communication problems in the international and intercultural settings.

This research employed a narrative inquiry to explore pattern and phenomenological order of the participants' personal experiences. Classification of the patterns and data observed are accomplished through the use of in-depth interview. The questions for the interview were adapted from Fantini's (2006, 2018, 2020) prominent works in order to determine participants' intercultural communicative competence as well as to investigate their strategies. Miles, Hubberman and Saldaña's (2018) data analysis technique was used to find the pattern emerged from the interview result. 16 Indonesian postgraduate students who come from a variety of academic fields involved in this study. Half were enrolled at Australian universities, whereas three of them were studying in the United Kingdom, and five people were in the United States. The participants were purposively chosen for their compliance and the availability of time. However, all were required to have spent at least two semesters living and studying in interactive seminar classrooms. Since they were still living abroad at the time of data

collection, the majority of respondents were interviewed by video conferencing (Zoom and Google Meet), while the remaining respondents were interviewed offline or in-person. Those who were interviewed face to face were students in Australian Universities since the researchers were in the country at the time of data collection. There were not any considerable differences emerged from both the online and offline interviews as all the participants seemed to answer the questions in a comfortable manner. Each participant took approximately 40-50 minutes for the interview. Using the narrative inquiry approach, the interview was started as a casual conversation as it evolved into a more patterned question-answer regarding the participants' experience in their international environment. The respondents were between the ages of 25 and 40. Details regarding the participants can be observed from the table below.

Code of Participants (P)	Gender	Age	Details
P1	Female	25 years old	born in Bandung, Master of Applied Linguistics, Monash University
P2	Male	38 years old	born in East Java, Ph.D. in Education, University of Sydney
P3	Female	26 years old	born in Bali, Master of International Development Studies, Monash University
P4	Male	30 years old	born in Surabaya, Master of Education, University of New South Wales
P5	Male	27 years old	born in Nusa Tenggara Timur, Master of Data Science, Monash University
P6	Female	25 years old	born in Malang, Master of Arts, University of Adelaide
P7	Male	29 years old	born in Aceh, Master of Civil Engineering, Monash University
P8	Female	32 years old	born in Nusa Tenggara Barat, Master of Education, Monash University
P9	Female	29 years old	born in Aceh, Master of Science, University of Bristol
P10	Female	27 years old	born in West Sumatra, Master of Education, University of Leeds
P11	Male	35 years old	born in Aceh, Master of Law & Public Policies, University of Sussex
P12	Male	39 years old	born in Aceh, Ph.D. in Primary Education, Ohio State University
P13	Female	37 years old	born in Medan, Ph.D. in Education, University of Texas Austin
P14	Male	37 years old	born in Aceh, Ph.D. in History, University of North Carolina
P15	Male	34 years old	born in North Sumatra, Ph.D. in Education, University of South Florida

P16	Male	35 years old	born in East Java, Ph.D. in Education and TESL, University of Maryland, Baltimore
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III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the descriptive qualitative analysis, the findings from the data set are classified into two categories and additional subcategories. First, the reasons that cause barriers in intercultural communication are discussed. Next it follows by the strategies used by the Indonesian students to tackle the situation to avoid the intercultural miscommunication when they were among their international peers.

3.1 ISSUES THAT CAUSE INTERCULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

3.1.1 UNAWARE TO THE EXISTENCES OF DIFFERENT DIALECTICAL USED IN ENGLISH

Being international students at global universities, to have ability at recognising varieties of English/Englishes is a necessity. Unaware to the existences of different dialectical used in English may compromise other transition concerns, resulting in an inability to create intercultural exchange with other international and domestic peers. Further, due to the spread of English as a heterogeneous language, exposure to multidialectal and multiple conceptualisations of Englishes are exceptionally demanding process.

“Back then in Indonesia, my English teacher never taught me varieties of English like I encountered here, I used to learn and listen for only American English...and the English Language materials that we have in our textbook was also written in American English. So, first time I encounter intercultural interaction with my friends such as from Korea, India, China and Australia, I found it hard to understand them....” (P9)

The participant’s statement above would resonate with many other English as foreign language students in Indonesia. Many English teachers at level of Junior high school and Senior high school would assert that there are only 2 standard English that should be recognized, i.e., British English and American English. Reflecting on the authors personal accounts, English teachers in Indonesia hardly ever explain that English is not merely spoken in the assumed major accents. In fact, students are rarely exposed to learning materials that adopted the Australian accent. However, in the international context where English users are widely various, English might be affected by many accents, even by a very thick one such as Indian English, Vietnamese English, etc. It should be noted that from P9’s case, interacting with other students whose English is not their first language is a positive sign, on the other hand misunderstanding could be raised. Therefore, a ‘passive competent’ like ‘multidialectal competence’, which is brought up by Canagarajah (2006), is necessary in intercultural communication context, in this case especially, in the education institution environment like universities where international students engaged intensively.

3.1.2 DIFFERENT MODE OF VIEWS IN VALUES

The excerpt below describes one of P10’s experiences when she was living with her Australian roommates. She confronted a situation that would be characterized as a different social interaction where Australians usually greet each other when they encounter people they know even though they live in the same house. Greetings such ‘good morning’, ‘good night’, ‘hi’, ‘how’s your day?’ are commonly conversed in social interaction. On the other hand, P10, at the time, admitted that she was not ready for that type of social protocol. P10 came from a provincial country area in Indonesia where most people do not recognize saying ‘good morning’ to each other. In addition to this, prior to her departure to Australia, P10 had never had much experience engaging in international communities. When she was reluctant to respond to her interlocutors, she said that she was taking time to process the new way of communication and did not mean to create distantance. However, this different speaking custom was not seen favourable when interacting with an Australian or anyone coming from a more multicultural context. Not converging into the custom of the place where we live might create an awkward situation and develop negative preconception.

At the beginning when I arrived in Australia, I was living with two Australian working ladies, and I didn't really expect to hear greetings like "Good Morning" or "Good Night"

uttered every time we went to bed. 'Assalamualaikum' is all we say when we meet or part ways with someone, and we don't really greet that much; we merely smile when we do so. When she murmured "good morning" to me as I stepped out of my bedroom, I felt compelled to react, lest she think I was being impolite. At one time, I still recalled that moment, and I asked myself, Am I being rude? Am I still unfamiliar with Australian customs? (P10)

As every culture has its unique concept and value systems, cultural discrepancy has repeatedly caused impediment among intercultural speakers. In this case, P10 views on greeting is noticeably influenced by her own culture on seeing the world, particularly in terms of greeting manner. Her (P10) orientation in valuing Australian greeting has significantly caused problem in intercultural interaction. Therefore, one practical element that is essential to be mentioned is by *displaying respect* to others, in order to show a positive attitude. Further, being *flexible* as well as express *initiating* when encountered intercultural communication is also crucial in this circumstance. Furthermore, instead of putting a judgemental respond to that greeting (such as being ignorant to not reply), being able to acknowledge and respect other people culture is fundamentally required during face-to-face intercultural interaction, in other words 'to see the world with different perspective'. To conclude, it confirmed the demand of seven dimensions of ICC behavioural approach that proposed by Ruben (1976), to be successfully competent in intercultural interaction.

3.1.3 MISINTERPRETED MEANING IN PARTICULAR SETTING

"When I had a collaborative learning experience with other international students, I was exhausted and sleepy. While everyone in the group is working hard to complete the task, I was uninterested in group work since I figured it could be completed just as well without my contribution. Then all of sudden, at this one time, one student said to me, 'you better get sleep when we are working on it'. Without complaining, then I just sat comfortably and relaxed. But that was actually..." (P7)

The excerpt above illustrates a group work situation among several international students and at some point, the participant (P7) received a sarcastic utterance from his peer. The line 'you better get sleep when we are working on it' should have not been understood literally. Here, P7 had failed to recognize the real intention behind the phrases and by extension, misread the situation. As the result, his friend got irritated by his following action and P7 did not even realize it.

Interpersonal communication in global colleges can be severely hampered by misunderstandings. It could lead to misinterpretation and misapprehension. In this case, P7 was apparently misinterpreting the 'sarcasm' being used by his colleague. He thought that what his colleague was saying is something that really support him to pause and take a rest. But it was actually a "sarcasm" which was being used to rhetorically telling something that means the opposite one. Misinterpreting meaning in communication like this have been done by many 'intercultural speakers' because mostly they rely on the norms of their native language. P7 admitted that he came from a small city in Indonesia where this type of sarcasm was not very palpable for him. Another case could be that the utterances did not appear to be a mocking remark for P7 because he did not realize it due to limited language pragmatic ability. In this sense, it confirmed the theory Multidimensional ICC model as Byram (1997) proposed, which encompass the element of *savoir comprendre* means the ability to interpret meaning and relate something on the context is essential in intercultural communication. Additionally, complex language ability is essential to increase one's intercultural communicative competence.

3.2 STRATEGIES BEING USED TO COUNTER INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SETBACKS

3.2.1 GIVE CREDENCE TO DIVERSITY

After discussing what might cause problem when communicating with people in an intercultural context, the participants were asked what lesson they would keep to themselves and strategies they would use to overcome the communication barrier. The excerpts below show the participants' perceptions and their approach to reduce the social awkwardness during the social interaction in within an international environment.

“...After a while, though, I learned that I can't be ignorant, disrespectful, or naive like I was when I did what I did. I have to accept that every culture has its own set of values, and I have to respect them. Because of that, when they greet me, I try to respond and show a positive attitude, and I've done that each and every day since then, which means that I've converged to them. As long as that doesn't hurt my own value, I respect that.” (P10)

“I think the most important strategy to assist myself in dealing this kind of intercultural communication problem is by being open and accept the differences. By being open, and lenient towards unintended insult caused by cultural differences. Equally important is to be willing to learn and being cooperative. I use this strategy often while I am in Australia. I think that my interlocutors are also aware of this.” (P1)

“I have to develop my knowledge about other people culture, and also I must have much exposure I mean to interact with a lot of people, so I will learn more, and I will become more open-minded, and of course I have to respect their culture as well” (P16)

From these quotes, it can be observed that the participants have acknowledged several important lessons regarding their experiences in intercultural communication. For these reasons, it can be admitted that the essence of intercultural awareness is to foster intercultural speakers with converging into other's culture and accept the diversity. This is one of the most frequently cited reasons for the breakdown of communication between international and domestic students, particularly when international students choose to stay in communities alongside local residents (Jackson, 2010). Thus, it should be noted that it is essential to start learning something from those differences that appeared during intercultural encounters. This fact is also visible in the classroom, where teachers have a widespread perception that certain overseas students create groups of people who share a shared culture and first language. Therefore, individuals should strengthen themselves with being open by changing the ego mind-set/ethnocentric as well as start treating different culture based on respect.

Numerous theoretical frameworks (Ruben's behavioral approach, Arasatnam and Doerfel's Culture-Generic Approach, and Sharifian's metacultural competence) argue that open-mindedness and multicultural awareness are necessary components of intercultural competence. This is congruent with Davies and Rizk's (2018) argument that a lack of understanding about others' social and cultural practices, as well as cultural disparities, might result in communication breakdown and prohibit people from interacting further. On the other hand, cultural familiarity and language proficiency boost overseas students' endeavours to establish friendships with both domestic and international students.

3.2.2 ENGAGING IN A COLLABORATIVE MANNER

While P10, P1, and P16 assert strongly that an awareness of cultural diversity is a necessary component of intercultural competence, P2 and P6 responded that it is critical to question our preconceived assumptions and prior knowledge about other people. Each individual has a unique perspective on things (in a more limited context), as well as a different insight upon that world (in a more general context). In essence, most people tend to assume that others will behave just as we expect they would. As a consequence, we should exercise our self - restraint when expressing ourselves, posing questions, and responding, as failing to do so will have negative impacts for our fellow interlocutors.

In this particular component, P2 has to put a collaborative manner during his experience encountered intercultural communication, by asking for apology towards his peer interlocutors. Collaborative engagement between multicultural students benefits both the international student and the host student, as well as the university. Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013) assert that the presence of international students will expose the opportunities for host students to be exposed more to other languages and socio-cultural identities. Additionally, interactions between the two groups may result in establishing a more extensive social network, from which they might benefit mutually through the exchange of ideas, information, experiences, and encouragement. However, once students enter the professional world, their ties will aid them in their future endeavours (Krajewski, 2011).

“When I was volunteering in the spring-fling festival, I am having a chit-chat with my Australian working partner. Every time she talked to me, I just answering it with a very direct answer and bluntly, without adding more explanation...for about a moment it was very awkward situation. But this happened actually because I assume that Australian people really want to talk directly. Later on, I realise that in Australia, the people here really love a small talk so that I should talk more and engage in conversation.” (P6)

“My Vietnamese roommate is funny most of the time. One day, while we are having a lunch, we are having a small chit-chat. He informed me that he's attempting to obtain a permanent residence visa to stay in Australia and had to take PTE test. Then I asked him about his plan for his future if he failed the test, “what will you do if you failed the test? by asking directly. I was attempting to ask his plan for the future if the visa got rejection. But it turns out he assume that I was hoping him to be failed. A moment after that I apologized right away and reveal my true intention of asking him that question. In that case I thought first it will be okay if I ask the way I ask thing, but it result in different way, so I tried to engage in a collaborative manner”. (P2)

Interacting with people from various cultures and perspectives will familiarize local students with developing their intercultural awareness. They will also improve their intercultural communicative competence, which has become an increasingly important requirement in today's globalized society. It is reasonable to suggest that being interculturally competent influences a positive outcome. Further, this is also supported by a variety of ICC theories and approaches; this essential competence conceives the ability to understand one another, avoid conflict among interlocutors, and foster decision-making skills. As a matter of fact, it will also contribute to the internationalization of higher education goal of producing graduates capable of working in a multinational and multicultural environment.

All in all, two important implications emerge from the findings. First, the importance of self-development during the acculturation process cannot be overstated. According to Dearthoff (2006), "intercultural competency is viewed as a lifelong practice." This research served as the foundation for creating a handbook for international students enrolled at the university. The group became more cohesive and active on campus due to the implementation of these activities. The institution held an annual Cultural Appreciation Day, which resulted in a better cultural life on campus. It was clear that social connection and cultural appreciation were taking place. Cross-cultural experience teaches us that people seek meaning and identify themselves in some way as members of a globalized society. This paved the way for the establishment of an organization for international students. Second, the need to change the EFL teaching idea in the Indonesian educational system, owing to the prevalence of English variations. According to the participants' concern, EFL education in Indonesia primarily focuses on American English (AmE) and British English. In fact, the primary goal of foreign language learning is to develop cross-cultural communicative competence, and the course objectives are to acquire these competencies sequentially (Nesterova & Remizova, 2019). Therefore, language curriculum designers and educational policy makers need to step in and reform the language program. English teachers in Indonesia must be informed not to set English usage as secluded. It is important to understand the standard use of the language, but students also need the exposure of how English is spoken in international context.

Interestingly, several methods have been identified due to Indonesian students' intercultural interactions and acculturation processes. Although the emergence of cultural variety exists in inner circle countries educational systems, Indonesian students have tried to increase their exposure to intercultural engagement. According to the researchers' observation, some efforts must be commended on the part of Indonesian students as they converge with other students and the community in which they live. As a result, another essential point to advocate in this research is that Indonesian students should endeavour to expand their circle and comfort zone to be more receptive to initiating communication with students from various countries. Equally significant, the inclusion of inner circle cultures needs to be integrated in Indonesia EFL's curriculum setting (Ubaidillah, 2019).

IV CONCLUSION

To summarize, the study aimed to investigate the primary issues contributing to intercultural communication misunderstandings and classify which elements of ICC might be developed to increase student's intercultural competence. Apparently, Indonesian students undertaking graduate programs abroad have faced situations that might lead intercultural miscommunication. These might cause by students' lack of awareness regarding the varieties of English use in international context. Foreign language learners, especially in Indonesia, are barely informed that English is not only spoken by people from the inner circle countries such as United Kingdom, USA, Australia, Canada, etc. Having different culture, values, and tradition has also contributed to barriers in a social interaction in multicultural settings. Indonesian students might encounter several communication cues that they have never found in their cultural context which would generate confusion as to how to give a natural response. Another is

the lack of language competence might cause inability to interpret the real meaning between interlocutors. Not realizing what the speakers are really saying might cause the students to react inappropriately and create a communication breakdown. However, there are also strategies found among those Indonesian students such as accommodating to different cultural values in an international context is essential for smooth communication process. This could also be fostered by engaging themselves in more collaborative activities, either for academic or social purposes.

The result of the study might inform educational stakeholders at different levels. For example, it is crucial for the scholarship providers to give a substantial amount of intercultural communication training for their awardees in order to maintain academic success and networking at global universities. At the institutional level, language curriculum designers and policy makers ought to consider introducing world Englishes or English in the global context for its students. Therefore, Indonesian speakers of English can be ready to collaborate at an international circumstance and avoid being rude to other people from different cultural background.

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