

## Students Intercultural Competence in Their Ability to Communicate from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

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### ABSTRACT

Intercultural competence is an essential skill for students in today's globalized educational landscape, particularly in English language learning contexts. This study investigates students' intercultural competence, focusing on their ability to adapt and communicate effectively across diverse cultural boundaries. Employing a quantitative survey approach, data were collected from 53 university students engaged in English language programs. Findings reveal varying levels of competence: while 35.8% of participants reported ease in adapting to cultural differences, nearly half (49.1%) expressed neutrality, indicating limited confidence or experience. Challenges such as language barriers (62.3%) and unfamiliarity with social customs (20.8%) were identified as significant obstacles. Despite these challenges, students participating in cultural exchange programs or engaging with diverse peers demonstrated enhanced competence, gaining enriched perspectives, improved communication skills, and stronger social bonds. Positive experiences included language acquisition, cultural understanding, and mutual respect. To address gaps, the study recommends integrating intercultural communication training, cultural awareness workshops, and experiential learning programs into curricula. Additionally, fostering supportive environments through mentorship and safe spaces for dialogue is essential. These interventions aim to empower students, equipping them for effective communication and collaboration in multicultural academic and professional settings.

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## INTRODUCTION

Intercultural competence is a critical skill in today's interconnected world, where individuals frequently interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the context of education, intercultural competence is particularly significant for students in English language courses, as the global use of English necessitates interactions across cultural boundaries. Effective communication in such contexts requires not only linguistic proficiency but also an understanding of cultural nuances, adaptability, and empathy.

In a globalized world, intercultural competence is increasingly recognized as a vital skill for effective communication and collaboration across diverse cultural boundaries. "In the globalized world, English plays a pivotal role in facilitating intercultural communication among people from diverse local cultures" (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). For students, particularly those in language and multicultural education programs, the ability to interact meaningfully with individuals from different cultural backgrounds is critical (Lumentut & Lengkoan, 2022); (Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023). Intercultural competence involves not only linguistic proficiency but also an awareness of cultural differences, adaptability, and the ability to build empathetic relationships. Previous research underscores the importance of intercultural competence as a key factor in fostering global citizenship and reducing intercultural misunderstandings.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Intercultural will come from multicultural, there was a research related to affect multicultural to the students (Wilma Pafitri, 2023). Studies have shown that students exposed to intercultural learning environments demonstrate improved adaptability and communication skills. Vekić, (2020); Rorintulus et al., (2023); Nangoy et al., (2023) highlighted that intercultural competence includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, such as understanding cultural diversity, respecting differences, and adjusting one's communication style based on cultural contexts. Additionally, (Portraits, 1988) emphasizes the role of intercultural communicative competence in language learning, where students must navigate cultural nuances alongside linguistic elements. These findings suggest that intercultural competence is essential for effective communication in diverse social and professional settings. Some previous studies also related to the students' intercultural (Syahrin et al., 2023), (Feng, 2024), (Schwarzenthal et al., 2020), (Portraits, 1988), (Hackett et al., 2023), (Ilie, 2019), and (Liu & Shirley, 2021). However, challenges persist. Students often face language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and emotional discomfort when engaging with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, a study by Chen and Starosta

This study focuses on evaluating the level of intercultural competence among students enrolled in English language programs. It seeks to address the primary

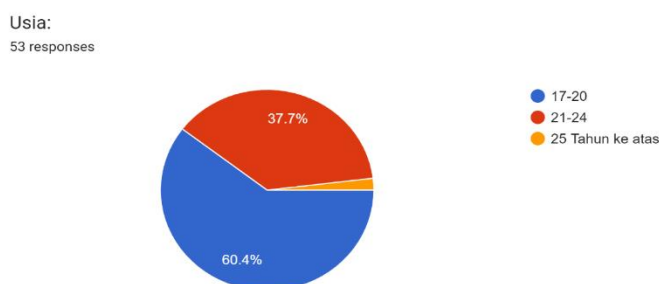
question: To what extent do students demonstrate intercultural competence in their ability to adapt and communicate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds? By examining students' comfort levels, challenges encountered, and exposure to different cultures, the research aims to shed light on factors that influence intercultural interactions.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform educators about students' intercultural capabilities, providing insights that can enhance language education. Integrating cultural awareness and communication strategies into the curriculum can foster more effective and empathetic communicators. Moreover, understanding students' experiences and challenges can help design targeted interventions to bridge gaps in intercultural competence. The study employs a quantitative approach using surveys to collect data from a diverse group of university students. By analyzing this data, the research contributes to the broader discourse on intercultural competence, offering practical recommendations to improve students' readiness for multicultural interactions in academic, social, and professional settings.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative research design using a descriptive survey method to collect numerical data for statistical analysis of students' intercultural competence. The target population comprised university students enrolled in English language courses, with a sample size of approximately 53 students selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure demographic representation (e.g., age, gender, cultural background). Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire distributed electronically via Google Forms, which included closed-ended Likert scale questions (1-5) to measure agreement or comfort levels in intercultural interactions and open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights into personal experiences and challenges. Responses to open-ended questions were coded and categorized for thematic analysis. The research process spanned eight weeks: Weeks 1-2 focused on developing and validating the questionnaire, Week 3 on pilot testing and refining it, Weeks 4-5 on data collection, Weeks 6-7 on data analysis and interpretation, and Week 8 on reporting findings and conclusions. Participants received instructions on the study's purpose and assurances of confidentiality to encourage candid responses.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

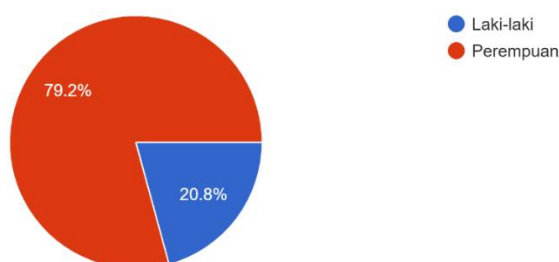


Ages 17-20: This group often consists of high school and early college students with limited exposure to diverse cultures. Their intercultural competence is typically formative, influenced by educational settings and social interactions.

Ages 21-24: Representing more advanced college students or early professionals, this group generally has greater exposure to multicultural environments through study abroad programs or diverse university settings. They may exhibit higher levels of intercultural sensitivity and adaptability.

Above 25 Years: This group often includes individuals who have entered the workforce or pursued further education. Their experiences may consist of professional interactions in culturally diverse settings, which can enhance their intercultural competence significantly.

Jenis Kelamin:  
53 responses

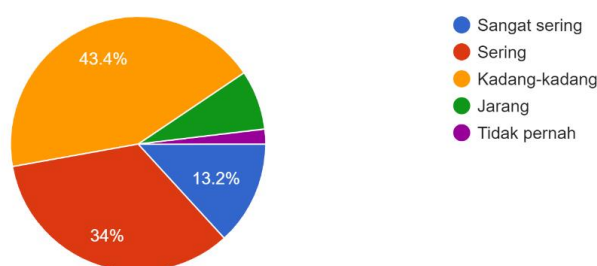


The gender distribution data indicates that 79.2% of participants are female, while 20.8% are male. This disparity can significantly affect intercultural competence, as gender can influence communication styles, emotional intelligence, and social dynamics.

The gender distribution data indicates that 79.2% of participants are female, while 20.8% are male, which can have significant implications for intercultural competence. Female participants often exhibit higher emotional intelligence and empathy, enhancing their ability to understand and navigate cultural nuances in communication. They also excel in collaborative environments, fostering teamwork and inclusivity, which are essential for effective intercultural interactions. However, they may face challenges such as stereotypes that undermine their authority or communication effectiveness, particularly in male-dominated contexts, and societal norms regarding gender roles that can impact how they communicate and are perceived in intercultural settings.

On the other hand, male participants tend to display higher confidence levels in leadership roles, facilitating assertive communication in diverse cultural contexts. They may also be more willing to take risks in their communication approaches, leading to innovative interactions across cultures. Nevertheless, they encounter barriers due to traditional communication styles that prioritize assertiveness over collaboration, potentially hindering effective intercultural dialogue. Additionally, men are often socialized to be self-reliant, which can prevent them from seeking assistance or feedback when navigating complex intercultural situations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where all students can enhance their intercultural competence effectively.

Seberapa sering Anda berinteraksi dengan individu dari latar belakang budaya yang berbeda?  
53 responses



The data regarding participants' frequency of interaction with individuals from different cultural backgrounds reveals that 43.4% interact occasionally, 34% often, and 13.2% seldom. This distribution highlights varying levels of exposure to diverse cultures among the participants, which can significantly impact their intercultural competence.

A substantial portion of participants (43.4%) who interact occasionally may have limited opportunities to develop their intercultural skills fully. While they engage with different cultures from time to time, this infrequent interaction may not provide enough context or experience to build confidence and adaptability in diverse settings. For these individuals, occasional interactions could lead to misunderstandings or discomfort due to a lack of familiarity with cultural nuances.

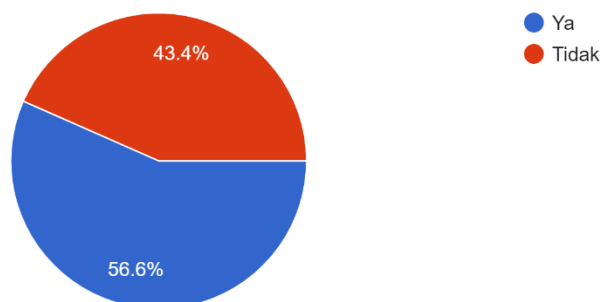
In contrast, the 34% of participants who interact often are likely to possess a higher level of intercultural competence. Regular engagement with individuals from diverse backgrounds can enhance their understanding of different perspectives, improve their communication skills, and foster greater empathy. This group is more likely to navigate cultural differences effectively and adapt their communication styles accordingly.

The 13.2% of participants who seldom interact with individuals from different cultures may face significant challenges in developing intercultural competence. Their limited exposure can result in heightened anxiety or discomfort when encountering cultural diversity, making it difficult for them to adapt and

communicate effectively in intercultural situations.

Apakah Anda pernah belajar tentang budaya lain di luar kelas?

53 responses



The findings regarding participants' responses to the question "Have you ever studied other cultures outside of class?" reveal that 56.6% have engaged in studying other cultures, while 43.4% have not. This data provides valuable insights into the participants' exposure to and understanding of cultural diversity, a critical component of intercultural competence.

The majority of participants (56.6%) who have studied other cultures outside of class likely possess a broader awareness and understanding of cultural differences. This engagement can take various forms, such as reading literature, participating in cultural events, attending workshops, or engaging with diverse communities. Such experiences can enhance their ability to communicate effectively across cultures by providing them with knowledge about different customs, values, and communication styles. As a result, this group may demonstrate greater adaptability and sensitivity in intercultural interactions, which are essential skills for navigating diverse social environments.

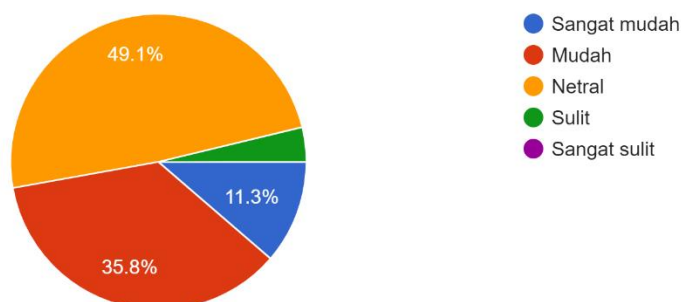
Conversely, the 43.4% of participants who have never studied other cultures may face challenges in developing intercultural competence. Their lack of exposure to cultural diversity outside the classroom can limit their understanding of different perspectives and reduce their ability to engage meaningfully with individuals from various backgrounds. This knowledge gap may lead to discomfort or misunderstandings when encountering cultural differences, potentially hindering effective communication and relationship-building.

The data indicates that those who have actively sought to study other cultures outside of formal education are better positioned to develop intercultural competence. Encouraging all participants to engage in cultural studies and experiences can significantly enhance their understanding and appreciation of diversity, ultimately fostering a more inclusive environment where effective intercultural communication thrives. Programs that promote cultural exploration –

such as community engagement activities, cultural exchange programs, or workshops – could be beneficial in bridging the gap for those who have not yet pursued such opportunities.

Ketika menghadapi perbedaan budaya, seberapa mudah bagi Anda untuk beradaptasi?

53 responses



The responses to the question "When faced with cultural differences, how easy is it for you to adapt?" indicate a range of comfort levels among participants regarding their ability to navigate intercultural situations. The data reveals that 49.1% of participants feel neutral about their adaptability, 35.8% find it easy, and a smaller percentage feel that adapting is very easy.

#### 1. Neutral Responses (49.1%):

The largest group of participants (49.1%) feeling neutral suggests a significant ambivalence or uncertainty regarding their adaptability in the face of cultural differences. This may indicate that while they recognize the importance of adapting to diverse cultures, they may not have enough experience or confidence to assert that they can do so easily. This neutrality could stem from a lack of exposure to cultural diversity or insufficient practice in navigating intercultural interactions, leading to feelings of hesitation when faced with unfamiliar cultural contexts.

#### 2. Easy Responses (35.8%):

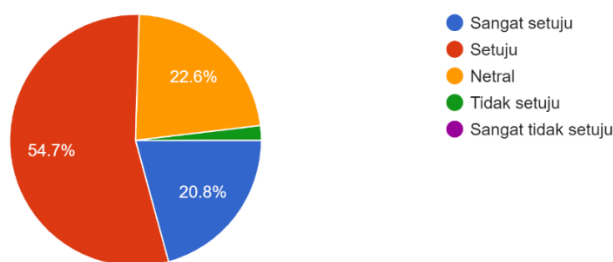
A considerable portion of participants (35.8%) who find it easy to adapt indicates a positive level of confidence in their intercultural skills. These individuals likely possess some familiarity with diverse cultures, whether through personal experiences, education, or social interactions. Their ability to adapt easily suggests that they are comfortable with cultural differences and can navigate them without significant difficulty. This group may have developed effective strategies for communication and understanding across cultures, contributing to their sense of ease.

### 3. Very Easy Responses (5.1%):

The smallest segment of participants (5.1%) who feel that adapting is very easy represents those who are exceptionally confident in their intercultural competence. These individuals may have extensive experience interacting with diverse cultures or possess strong interpersonal skills that facilitate smooth communication and adaptation in various cultural contexts. Their high level of comfort suggests that they not only understand cultural differences but also thrive in multicultural environments.

The data reflects a spectrum of adaptability among participants when faced with cultural differences. While nearly half express neutrality, indicating potential uncertainty or lack of experience, a significant portion feels confident in their ability to adapt easily. The small percentage who finds it very easy highlights the need for further development and support for the majority who may benefit from additional exposure and training in intercultural communication. To enhance overall adaptability, educational programs and initiatives that encourage interaction with diverse cultures could be instrumental in building confidence and skills among all participants, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and culturally competent community.

Apakah Anda merasa bahwa pemahaman budaya Anda mempengaruhi cara Anda berkomunikasi dengan orang lain?  
53 responses



The responses to the question "Do you feel that your cultural understanding affects the way you communicate with others?" reveal important insights into participants' perceptions of the relationship between cultural understanding and communication. The data indicates that 20.8% of participants strongly agree, 54.7% agree, and 22.6% remain neutral regarding this connection.



**1. Strongly Agree (20.8%):**

A notable minority of participants (20.8%) who strongly agree suggests that they have a clear and profound recognition of the impact that cultural understanding has on their communication styles. These individuals likely possess a deep awareness of how cultural nuances influence interactions, such as differing communication norms, values, and expectations. Their strong agreement indicates that they actively consider cultural factors when engaging with others, which may enhance their effectiveness in intercultural communication.

**2. Agree (54.7%):**

The largest group of participants (54.7%) who agree indicates a consensus that cultural understanding plays a significant role in shaping communication. This majority reflects an acknowledgment that awareness of cultural differences can improve interpersonal interactions and reduce misunderstandings. Participants in this category likely recognize that their ability to adapt their communication styles based on cultural context can lead to more meaningful and effective exchanges with others. This perspective suggests a growing recognition of the importance of intercultural competence in both personal and professional settings.

**3. Neutral (22.6%):**

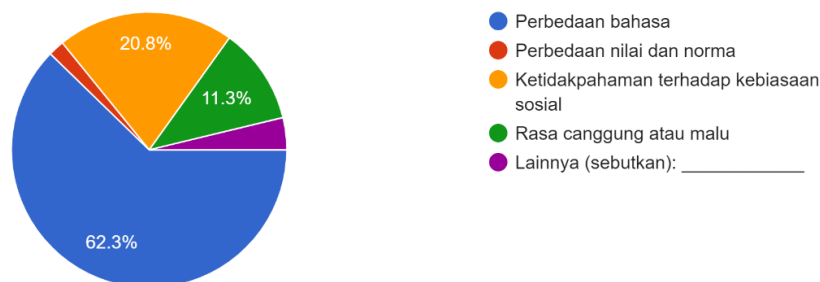
The 22.6% of participants who remain neutral may indicate uncertainty or ambivalence about the relationship between cultural understanding and communication. This neutrality could stem from a lack of experience with diverse cultures or insufficient reflection on how their own cultural backgrounds influence their interactions with others. Participants in this category may not yet fully grasp the significance of cultural factors in communication or may not have encountered situations where these factors were particularly relevant.

The data demonstrates a strong awareness among participants regarding the influence of cultural understanding on communication, with a combined total of 75.5% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. This suggests a positive trend toward recognizing the importance of intercultural competence in enhancing communication effectiveness. However, the presence of a significant neutral group indicates an opportunity for further education and exploration of how cultural factors shape interactions. By fostering discussions and providing resources on intercultural communication, educators and facilitators can help all participants deepen their understanding and appreciation for the role that culture plays in

effective communication, ultimately leading to more inclusive and productive interactions across diverse settings

Apa tantangan terbesar yang Anda hadapi saat berinteraksi dengan orang dari budaya yang berbeda? (pilih semua yang relevan)

53 responses



The responses to the question "What is the biggest challenge you face when interacting with people from different cultures?" reveal significant insights into the primary obstacles participants encounter in intercultural communication. The data indicates that 62.3% identify language differences as the main challenge, 20.8% cite a lack of understanding of social customs, and 11.3% report feeling awkward or embarrassed.

### 1. Language Differences (62.3%):

A substantial majority of participants (62.3%) view language differences as the biggest challenge in intercultural interactions. This finding underscores the critical role that language plays in effective communication. Language barriers can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and frustration, making it difficult for individuals to convey their thoughts and feelings accurately. Participants who struggle with language differences may feel less confident in their ability to engage meaningfully with others, which can inhibit their willingness to initiate conversations or participate fully in intercultural exchanges. This challenge highlights the need for language support and resources, such as language learning programs or translation tools, to facilitate smoother communication across cultural divides.

### 2. Lack of Understanding of Social Customs (20.8%):

The second most common challenge reported by participants (20.8%) is a lack of understanding of social customs. This indicates that while language is a significant barrier, cultural nuances and social norms also

play a crucial role in effective communication. Participants may find it challenging to navigate different cultural expectations regarding behavior, etiquette, and non-verbal communication cues. This lack of understanding can lead to unintentional offenses or misunderstandings that hinder relationship-building. Increasing awareness and education about various cultural customs through workshops or intercultural training can help participants develop greater sensitivity and adaptability when interacting with individuals from different backgrounds.

### 3. **Feeling Awkward or Embarrassed (11.3%):**

A smaller percentage of participants (11.3%) report feeling awkward or embarrassed when interacting with people from different cultures. This emotional response may stem from anxiety about making mistakes, miscommunicating, or inadvertently offending someone due to cultural differences. Feelings of awkwardness can create barriers to open and effective communication, as individuals may withdraw or avoid engaging altogether out of fear of negative judgment. Addressing these feelings through supportive environments that encourage open dialogue about cultural differences can help participants build confidence and reduce anxiety in intercultural interactions.

The data highlights that language differences are the most significant challenge faced by participants when interacting with individuals from different cultures, followed by a lack of understanding of social customs and feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment. To enhance intercultural communication skills among participants, it is essential to address these challenges through targeted interventions such as language support initiatives, cultural awareness training, and creating safe spaces for dialogue about cultural differences. By doing so, individuals can develop the confidence and competence needed to navigate diverse cultural interactions more effectively, ultimately fostering more inclusive and meaningful connections across cultures.

*Students demonstrate varying degrees of intercultural competence in their ability to adapt and communicate effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds*

**Table 1. Please specify the culture you studied and the methods you used to study it.**

Students	Yes/No	Answers
1	Yes	Japanese and European culture through films and cultural events outside and on campus

2	No	
3	No	
4	Yes	Language and how to interact/communicate, Culture in West Java (Sunda) when I participated in the Merdeka 4 Student Exchange program at the Indonesian Education University.
5	Yes	I have studied the tribes of Kalimantan, namely the Dayak tribe, by using Google, but more often watching YouTube videos about the Dayak tribe.
6	No	
7		Matsuri (祭り) - Traditional Festival
	Yes	Description: Japan has many festivals, usually held to honor Shinto gods or celebrate the seasons. Examples of famous festivals are the Gion Matsuri in Kyoto or the Tanabata Matsuri in various cities. How to learn: You can learn about these festivals by attending them in Japan, watching documentaries, or reading books about their history and origins.
8	No	
9	No	
10	No	-
11	No	
12	Yes	The culture of Nias is the stone jumping tradition
13	Yes	Japan, Attending the annual Japanese cultural festival (Bunkasai) held on campus.
14	No	
15	Yes	The culture that I study is Minahasan culture. The way I study it is by interacting with Minahasan society so that I already know some of Minahasan culture.
16	No	
17	No	
18	Yes	Javanese language: use of language and traditional clothing
19	Yes	Because I really like Korea, I also study some Korean cultures such as Korean Cuisine: Typical South Korean foods such as kimchi, bibimbap, and tteokbokki. Hanbok: Beautiful and elegant traditional South Korean clothing. Also unique and interesting Korean cultural celebrations.
20	Yes	batak
21	No	
22	Yes	The culture of the people of East NTT by going directly to the field and studying it directly from local residents
23	Yes	I learned about Minahasan culture by interacting with people who adhere to that culture and because I live in Tondano where the culture adhered to in this place is Minahasan culture, there are many historical places that tell about that culture, such as the Moraya Fort tour where

		there are many writings that tell about Minahasan culture and Minahasan clans.
24	No	No
25	No	
26	Yes	Mane'ne ritual is one of the traditions in Toraja, South Sulawesi. I learned it directly in Toraja, the ritual is one of the traditions of cleaning the bodies of those who died hundreds of years ago which are shaped like mummies. This tradition is done by making a pilgrimage to the grave, opening the coffin and changing the clothes.
27	Yes	Sundanese culture, I learned this culture through the Merdeka Student Exchange in West Java
28	No	
29	Yes	<p>Javanese culture is one of the most rich and complex cultures in Indonesia, originating from the island of Java, which was the center of civilization and government for centuries. It developed with influences from various historical periods, including Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and Dutch colonial influences. Here are some important aspects of Javanese culture:</p> <p>1. Language and Literature</p> <p>Javanese has various levels or "bahasa levels" (levels of speech) that are used depending on the social context. There is ngoko (everyday language), krama (polite language), and krama inggil (very polite language), which indicates a level of respect for the person being spoken to.</p> <p>Javanese literature includes classical works such as Serat Centhini and Serat Wedhatama, as well as ancient Javanese poetry written in Javanese script.</p> <p>2. Arts and Performances</p> <p>Wayang kulit is a traditional form of theater that uses shadow puppets made of leather. The stories are often taken from Hindu epics such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, but can also include local legends.</p> <p>Gamelan is a traditional Javanese musical ensemble consisting of various musical instruments such as gongs, sarons, and drums. Gamelan is often used in ceremonies, celebrations, and wayang performances.</p> <p>Traditional Javanese dances, such as the Bedhaya Dance and Serimpi Dance, are heavily influenced by palace culture and typically feature gentle, meaningful, and symbolic movements.</p> <p>3. Palace and Caste System</p> <p>Javanese culture is heavily influenced by the feudal structure centered on the palace. The palaces of Yogyakarta and Surakarta (Solo) are the main centers of Javanese culture. There, the traditions and customs of the sultanate are maintained.</p>

Javanese culture has a strict social hierarchy. Even in everyday life, social status greatly influences the way people communicate and interact.

#### 4. Religion and Spirituality

Most Javanese people are Muslim, but the spiritual beliefs of Kejawen remain important, which are beliefs that combine elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and local animism. Kejawen emphasizes balance, harmony of nature, and respect for ancestors.

Rituals such as selamatan (a thanksgiving ceremony) and ruwatan (a ritual to cleanse the spirit of negative energy) are part of the spiritual traditions of the Javanese people.

#### 5. Customs and Ethics

Javanese people highly value social ethics known as pahata-ungguh, which emphasizes good manners.

30	Yes	Bolaang Mongondow culture such as Sinandoy food, a typical Bolaang Mongondow food consisting of beef stuffed into a reed or bamboo. This food is usually only found at big celebrations or parties.
31	Yes	Sundanese culture that I learned when I participated in the Ministry of Education and Culture's independent student exchange program
32	Yes	Nias Culture
33	No	-
34	Yes	Balinese culture
35	No	
36	Yes	Yes, Minahasa culture. I learned it through information from interactions with people who already know a lot about Minahasa culture and through the internet.
37	Yes	Korean culture, learning some of the language and living environment in the country
38	Yes	I have a friend who comes from Bali, he once introduced me to his cultural dance, namely the Kecak Dance.
39	Yes	Korean Culture
40	Yes	I learned about Balinese culture through the internet like tiktok
41	Yes	Korean Culture. I learn Korean culture from K-pop, and Korean dramas.
42	No	
43	Yes	For example, when I was interacting with a friend who had a different culture from me. He taught me how to speak Mongondow. I asked

		"What is Mongondow language, let's eat?" and my friend answered "Igai mo ngaan."
44	No	
45	No	
46	No	
47	Yes	Angklung, I learned it from my friend who comes from West Java.
48	No	
49	No	
50	Yes	The culture that I learned when interacting with me was Sangihe culture, where my friends who I just met while studying at this college were mostly from Sangihe, their culture, especially their language culture, made me learn and know that it turns out that here is rich in cultural diversity, especially language culture.
51	Yes	for example, the culture of the Sanger people, I was very happy when my friend explained about their culture, there is also Balinese culture which is very unique
52	No	
53	Yes	Batak culture, see info on tiktok

The table presents various instances of students engaging with and learning about different cultures.

### 1. Cultural Variety:

Students explored a diverse range of cultures, such as Japanese, Korean, Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, Dayak, Minahasan, and Batak cultures. These explorations often highlight traditional festivals, language, rituals, and cuisine.

### 2. Learning Methods:

**Experiential Learning:** Several students reported learning directly by participating in cultural exchange programs or through interactions with people from those cultures. For instance, the Merdeka Student Exchange program enabled students to immerse themselves in local customs.

**Media and Technology:** Others relied on modern tools like YouTube, TikTok, or online articles to understand cultural traditions, such as the Mane'ne ritual in Toraja or stone-jumping in Nias.

**Cultural Events:** Attending festivals (e.g., Japanese Bunkasai) and engaging in traditional activities provided hands-on cultural experiences.

**Peer Interaction:** Personal connections with friends from other cultural backgrounds facilitated learning, such as discovering Mongondow language phrases or being introduced to Balinese dance.

### 3. Key Cultural Elements Studied:

**Language and Communication:** Many focused on linguistic features, such as Javanese levels of politeness or learning conversational phrases from peers.

**Traditions and Rituals:** Some delved into specific cultural ceremonies, like the Mane'ne ritual or Javanese selamatan.

**Arts and Festivals:** Traditional performances, festivals, and arts like Angklung (West Java) or the Kecak Dance (Bali) were significant points of study.

**Cuisine and Clothing:** Cultures such as Korean were explored through their cuisine and traditional clothing like Hanbok.

#### 4. Intercultural Competence Demonstration:

**Adaptation:** Students exhibited the ability to adapt to new cultural contexts by participating actively in programs and events.

**Communication:** Learning and using phrases in other languages or engaging in dialogue with culturally diverse peers indicate efforts toward effective communication across cultures.

**Engagement:** Some students showed a deep commitment by not only attending events but also researching or learning through extended interactions.

This variety of answers and experiences illustrates a significant level of intercultural competence, as the students actively sought to understand and connect with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, the table also shows instances of non-participation, highlighting differences in interest or access to such opportunities.

**Table 2. Positive experience I had interacting with someone from a different culture**

Students	Answers
1	Becoming very knowledgeable about other cultures and having a high level of curiosity can also increase your chances of making new friends.
2	Good
3	Different speaking styles
4	I can acquire languages from cultures different from mine and I can apply them in my daily life.
5	One of the most memorable experiences, when I was just about to enter campus there were many people with different cultures. I thought it would be difficult to get along with them, but in the end we all got along easily. That experience changed my perspective on getting along with people of different ethnicities and cultures.
6	For experience, it may be a little but you still gain new knowledge about what the traditions/culture are like.
7	interacting with individuals from different cultures often opens up new insights



- 8 can know the language and customs of their culture
- 9 Positive Experience: I once had an experience when interacting with a friend from a different culture while participating in the campus Mengajar program. We shared stories about each other's traditions and customs which enriched my understanding of their perspective on life. From the discussion there was a sense of mutual respect and strengthened our friendship and ties until now.
- 10 can learn new things
- 11 Increasing relationships both in terms of communication and interaction.
- 12 My experience when interacting with a friend from a different culture was initially a little awkward and shy because of the differences in language and social understanding, but after several interactions, it turned out to be fun when interacting with friends from different cultures, because you can gain new knowledge and also new relationships.
- 13 Can enjoy typical food from different cultures.
- 14 "Positive experiences can be learned by directly interacting and exchanging ideas about each other's cultures."
- 15
- One positive experience I have had when interacting with individuals from different cultures is that it results in a deeper understanding of different perspectives, builds tolerance, and enriches insight. Such experiences can be an opportunity to learn new things, such as customs, languages, and unique values from other cultures, which can broaden one's view of the world.
- 16 can learn a little of their language
- 17 One of the most positive experiences I've ever had interacting with individuals from different cultures was when I spoke to someone from Japan. From that conversation, I learned a lot about the importance of politeness and how they respect other people's time and views. Every culture has its own unique way of communicating and respecting each other, and experiences like this broadened my perspective. You may have experienced similar experiences when interacting with people from different backgrounds, especially if you enjoy exploring or learning new things.
- 18 I can get experience to have new language and new understanding.
- 19 One of the experiences I had was being able to learn about Korean culture, such as talking about opinions about the world of K-pop, recommendations for tourist attractions or food, as well as culture, about ethics and manners in Korean culture.
- 20 can know about their place
- 21 Can know about new places
- 22 They are able to accept cultural differences and they even want to learn my culture.
- 23 In my experience, I have friends from different cultures but they still help me when I need help. Cultural differences are not a barrier for us to help each other.

- 24 One of the positive experiences I have had when interacting with people from different cultures is that I have become more open, tolerant, and understanding of different views.
- 25 The positive thing is that I can learn about the culture of the person I'm talking to and I can practice my English speaking skills.
- 26 "We can build relationships with each other, learn from each other and understand our respective cultures."
- 27 One of the positive experiences I had while interacting with individuals from Sundanese culture was when I joined a community project in Margamekar Village during the Merdeka Student Exchange program. The locals, who were predominantly Sundanese speakers, were very friendly and welcoming. Although I was not fluent in Sundanese at first, they patiently helped me learn some basic phrases. This made me feel more accepted and appreciate the richness of Sundanese culture. The experience deepened my understanding of the importance of cross-cultural communication and how respect can bridge language barriers.
- 28 Friendly, kind and peaceful
- 29 A possible positive experience is when they experience the friendliness and politeness of the Javanese. For example, in the highly respected tradition of "unggah-ungguh" or etiquette, guests are usually treated with great respect and are treated to special dishes such as tumpeng rice or gudeg.
- Such experiences can make individuals from outside Java feel accepted and appreciated, and provide new insights into the importance of manners and hospitality in Javanese culture. This can strengthen intercultural relationships and foster a deeper understanding of local values.
- 30 Can understand the language used
- 31 While contributing to social activities in Cisampih Village, Sumedang, West Java, I, who come from North Sulawesi, gained valuable experience interacting with local people from different cultures. Although initially awkward due to language differences, the friendliness of the residents made it easier for me to adapt. While cleaning the environment together, we exchanged stories about local customs and wisdom. From this experience, I learned the importance of respecting each other and working together in diversity, and understood how strong the value of mutual cooperation is in building togetherness.
- 32 Knowing what to do and what not to do when you are with people from different cultures is very useful for social life.
- 33 -
- 34 I can learn their language
- 35 Can learn their language or culture that we didn't know before
- 36 One of the positive experiences I have had when interacting with individuals from different cultures is when I was working in a group at school/college, I had a

discussion with colleagues from different cultures. Our discussion was about each other's culture.

- 37 When I was studying in Sangihe, I gained a lot of experience, from learning about cultures such as traditional events held on the Sangihe Islands, I also learned some of the Sangihe language and the regions on the islands.
- 38 I come from SMAN 1 school in Balikpapan, where in this school there are many friends from different ethnicities and cultures. Collaborating with them gave me a new experience in understanding different ways of learning and cultures. For example, they really value open discussions, which helps me be more confident in expressing my opinions.
- 39 One of the positive experiences I have had while interacting with individuals from different cultures was when I learned about the tradition of sharing food in their culture. I was invited to taste a typical dish that I had never tried before, and through that moment, I learned about the values of togetherness and hospitality in their culture. This experience made me more open to differences and strengthened my respect for the uniqueness of other cultures.
- 40 The positive experience that I had was that when communicating with them we could share the differences that exist in each other's cultures.
- 41 can learn new things
- 42 they respect each other
- 43 When I asked my friend from Kotamobagu, I asked what is the Mongondow language for "Let's eat." Then my friend answered "Igai mo nga'an." And I also said the same sentence to my father "Pa, igai mo nga'an." And papa answered "Pa'rut no nga'an."
- 44 They are willing to teach me their language and culture, when I pronounce a word wrong they tell me and teach me the correct one.
- 45 Can learn about other cultures
- 46 The experience that I was able to experience was when I was taught their language and vice versa, we learned together, and told each other about each other's culture and customs.
- 47 I was very excited when my friend told me about the culture of his hometown.
- 48 The time discipline shown to me when doing something
- 49 I can understand more about their culture
- 50 Get to know more
- 51 A friend of mine who lives in Bali told me about how the people there really value cleanliness, tidiness and politeness. This experience made him more aware of the importance of protecting the environment.
- 52 My friend and I speak different languages, we often share stories about each other's traditions and I have come to know a lot about existing traditions.
- 53 One of the most positive things is the ability to learn different perspectives from other cultures. For example, when someone from a different culture shares their views on life, family, or social values, it can be insightful and provide a deeper

understanding of human diversity. These interactions often enrich the way we understand the world, develop empathy, and broaden our perspectives.

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The table provides qualitative insights into students' experiences with intercultural competence, particularly focusing on their ability to adapt and communicate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Here are the key themes and detailed findings from the data:

1. Learning and Curiosity:

Many students expressed that intercultural interactions enhanced their knowledge of other cultures and languages (e.g., responses 1, 4, 15). This curiosity about customs, traditions, and communication styles helped them build relationships and broaden their worldview.

2. Overcoming Initial Barriers:

Some students initially found interactions with other cultures awkward due to differences in language or social understanding (e.g., responses 12, 31). However, positive experiences, such as mutual respect and patience, often helped them overcome these barriers and adapt effectively.

3. Gaining New Perspectives:

Interactions often led to a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives, tolerance, and respect for other cultures (e.g., responses 15, 53). Students highlighted how these experiences enriched their social and intellectual lives.

4. Language Acquisition:

Language learning was a recurrent theme, as students reported acquiring basic phrases or engaging in mutual language teaching (e.g., responses 16, 34, 44).

5. Cultural Exchange and Respect:

Many students emphasized the importance of cultural exchange, where they not only learned about others' traditions and customs but also shared their own culture (e.g., responses 9, 46).

6. Strengthened Relationships:

Intercultural interactions often led to lasting friendships, improved communication skills, and stronger social ties (e.g., responses 11, 26).

7. Practical Benefits:

Students noted specific takeaways, such as learning about politeness, discipline, and environmental care, which they applied to their lives (e.g., responses 17, 51).

#### 8. Positive Emotional Outcomes:

Many responses reflected joy and excitement when students discovered shared interests or unique aspects of other cultures (e.g., responses 39, 47).

The data demonstrates that while initial challenges in cross-cultural communication exist, they are often outweighed by the benefits of learning, personal growth, and the development of mutual respect and understanding. These experiences contribute significantly to students' intercultural competence.

### *Students' Comfort Levels When Interacting with Individuals from Different Cultures Vary Significantly*

#### **1. Varied Comfort Levels**

The reported levels of comfort reflect the spectrum of intercultural competence among students:

**Easy (35.8%):** This group likely benefits from prior exposure to multicultural environments, such as through exchange programs, diverse social circles, or cultural education. Their comfort stems from familiarity, which allows them to navigate differences effectively.

**Very Easy (5.1%):** This small group stands out for their high adaptability and confidence. Their ease likely results from extensive intercultural experiences, such as living abroad, frequent interactions with culturally diverse individuals, or active engagement in cultural learning.

**Neutral (49.1%):** The significant proportion of students feeling neutral suggests a lack of certainty about their ability to adapt. This may indicate limited intercultural exposure or confidence. While these students may recognize the importance of cultural sensitivity, they lack the practical experience needed to feel fully at ease.

#### **2. Challenges to Comfort**

Certain barriers hinder students' ability to feel comfortable in intercultural settings:

##### **Language Differences (62.3%):**

Language is the most frequently cited challenge, as misunderstandings or inability to express oneself can lead to frustration or withdrawal.

Students unfamiliar with a language may struggle to engage meaningfully, leading to feelings of inadequacy or fear of miscommunication.

##### **Lack of Understanding of Social Customs (20.8%):**

Misinterpretation of social norms and etiquette, such as appropriate greetings or gestures, can cause discomfort.

This issue highlights the need for increased cultural knowledge and preparation.

#### **Feelings of Awkwardness or Embarrassment (11.3%):**

Emotional factors like fear of making mistakes or being judged can create anxiety.

These feelings often discourage students from initiating intercultural interactions.

### **3. Factors Enhancing Comfort**

Several factors contribute to increased comfort and adaptability:

- **Frequency of Interaction:**

Students who engage regularly (34%) with people from different cultures tend to develop higher levels of comfort and intercultural competence. Such interactions provide opportunities to practice and refine their communication skills.

- **Participation in Cultural Programs:**

Involvement in activities such as the Merdeka Student Exchange Program allows students to immerse themselves in different cultural environments, fostering greater understanding and reducing hesitation.

- **Active Learning:**

Students who study cultures outside the classroom (56.6%) demonstrate broader awareness and sensitivity, equipping them to adapt better during real-life interactions.

### **4. Insights for Educational Interventions**

The findings underscore opportunities for enhancing students' intercultural competence:

#### **Language Support:**

Language learning programs or conversation practice opportunities could reduce the discomfort stemming from linguistic barriers.

#### **Cultural Awareness Workshops:**

Providing structured education on cultural norms and values can prepare students for intercultural encounters, alleviating the anxiety associated with the unknown.

#### **Encouraging Participation in Multicultural Experiences:**

Programs such as exchange initiatives, cultural festivals, and collaborative projects with diverse peers can give students practical exposure to intercultural dynamics.

## 5. Emotional and Practical Benefits

Despite the challenges, students recognize the positive outcomes of intercultural interactions:

### **Broadened Perspectives:**

Many students report gaining a deeper understanding of cultural differences and developing greater tolerance and empathy.

### **Enhanced Relationships:**

Intercultural encounters often result in stronger social bonds and collaborative skills, both crucial for academic and professional success.

### **Practical Skills:**

Students also gain specific competencies, such as improved language abilities and knowledge of cultural customs, which they can apply in various settings.

While many students are on a positive trajectory in developing intercultural competence, the findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address common barriers. By providing resources and opportunities for meaningful intercultural engagement, educators can foster greater comfort and confidence among students, preparing them for success in diverse global contexts.

## *Students Face Various Challenges in Intercultural Communication*

### **1. Language Differences (62.3%)**

#### **Impact:**

Language barriers are the most frequently cited challenge, as they hinder clear and effective communication.

Misunderstandings due to limited vocabulary or incorrect usage often result in frustration or embarrassment.

Students may struggle to convey their thoughts and emotions, leading to feelings of inadequacy.

#### **Example:**

Students may find it difficult to grasp subtle nuances in conversations, such as humor or idiomatic expressions, resulting in miscommunication.

#### **Solution:**

Providing language learning tools, practice opportunities, and translation aids can help overcome this barrier.

### **2. Lack of Understanding of Social Customs (20.8%)**

#### **Impact:**

Differences in cultural norms, etiquette, and non-verbal communication (e.g., gestures, body language) can cause confusion or unintentional offense.

Students may be unaware of cultural taboos or expectations, leading to awkward interactions.

**Example:**

A student might unknowingly use an inappropriate gesture or fail to adhere to local dining etiquette, which can be perceived as disrespectful.

**Solution:**

Workshops on cultural awareness and sensitivity training can help students understand and navigate diverse social customs.

### **3. Feelings of Awkwardness or Embarrassment (11.3%)**

**Impact:**

Emotional challenges, such as fear of making mistakes or being judged, create anxiety during intercultural interactions.

These feelings discourage students from initiating conversations or engaging deeply with others from different cultures.

**Example:**

A student may avoid interacting with peers from other cultures due to fear of being misunderstood or making cultural faux pas.

**Solution:**

Creating safe spaces for intercultural dialogue and normalizing mistakes as part of the learning process can boost students' confidence.

### **4. Limited Exposure to Cultural Diversity**

**Impact:**

Students with limited prior exposure to diverse cultures may lack the experience needed to adapt or communicate effectively.

This can result in uncertainty or hesitation when encountering unfamiliar cultural contexts.

**Example:**

A student who has only interacted with people from their own culture may feel overwhelmed when meeting individuals with vastly different backgrounds.

**Solution:**

Encouraging participation in exchange programs, multicultural events, and collaborative projects can increase exposure.

### **5. Preconceived Notions and Stereotypes**

**Impact:**

Prejudices or misconceptions about other cultures may hinder open-minded communication and understanding.



Students may make assumptions based on stereotypes, leading to biased or ineffective interactions.

**Example:**

A student might wrongly assume that certain behaviors or attitudes are universal, resulting in misinterpretation or conflict.

**Solution:**

Promoting intercultural education that challenges stereotypes and fosters critical thinking can help mitigate this issue.

## 6. Difficulty Adapting to Cultural Differences

**Impact:**

Adapting to unfamiliar cultural practices, values, and beliefs can be challenging, particularly when they conflict with a student's own. This may lead to resistance or discomfort in embracing diversity.

**Example:**

A student accustomed to direct communication may struggle in cultures where indirect communication is the norm.

**Solution:**

Structured training in adaptability and cultural flexibility can equip students to handle such differences effectively.

## 7. Lack of Support Systems

**Impact:**

Without adequate guidance or resources, students may feel isolated when navigating intercultural challenges. This can exacerbate feelings of frustration and diminish the motivation to engage in cross-cultural interactions.

**Solution:**

Providing mentorship programs, peer support groups, and access to cultural mediators can offer students the guidance they need.

The challenges faced by students in intercultural communication primarily revolve around language barriers, cultural unfamiliarity, emotional discomfort, and limited exposure. Addressing these issues requires a combination of education, practice, and supportive environments that encourage exploration and understanding of cultural diversity. These interventions can empower students to navigate intercultural situations confidently and effectively.

## CONCLUSION

The study reveals that students exhibit varying levels of intercultural competence in adapting and communicating with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. While some students report comfort and confidence, with 35.8%

finding it easy to adapt, nearly half (49.1%) remain neutral, indicating hesitation or limited experience. Language barriers (62.3%) and a lack of understanding of social customs (20.8%) are identified as the most significant challenges. However, students who engage in cultural exchange programs, personal cultural studies, or interactions with peers from different backgrounds demonstrate higher competence. Positive outcomes include enriched perspectives, improved language skills, and stronger social bonds. Despite these benefits, gaps in exposure and emotional barriers, such as fear of making mistakes, hinder some students from fully embracing intercultural communication.

To address these challenges, several strategies are recommended. Integrating cultural awareness and intercultural communication training into the curriculum is essential, along with offering workshops on cultural norms and providing language learning resources. Encouraging participation in cultural exchange programs, community engagement activities, and collaborative projects can foster experiential learning. Establishing support systems, such as mentorship programs and safe spaces for dialogue, can help students navigate intercultural challenges confidently. Additionally, regular assessments of intercultural skills with constructive feedback will allow tailored support for individual needs. By implementing these measures, educators can enhance students' intercultural competence, equipping them for effective communication and collaboration in diverse global contexts.

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