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Exploring Intercultural Communication in Indonesia: Cultural Values, Challenges, and Strategies

Abstract

Indonesia is a multicultural country with a deep cultural history. There are more than 300 different ethnic groups in the nation, and each has its own distinct traditions and customs. Relationship- and understanding-building between various cultures heavily depends on communication. Intercultural communication is so crucial in Indonesia. This review article's goal is to examine intercultural communication in Indonesia from a variety of angles. The obstacles of intercultural communication in Indonesia, as well as techniques for productive intercultural communication in Indonesia, are all examined in this article. The study's foundation is an analysis of the body of work on intercultural communication in Indonesia. The results show that understanding the cultural values, communication practises, and customs of the various ethnic groups is necessary for effective intercultural communication.

Introduction

Indonesia is a diverse country with more than 300 ethnic groups and over 700 languages spoken. The country's cultural diversity is reflected in its various customs and traditions, making it a fascinating place for intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is the process of exchanging information between people from different cultural backgrounds, and it plays a crucial role in building relationships and understanding among different cultures.

In Indonesia, effective intercultural communication requires an understanding of the cultural values, communication styles, and customs of the different ethnic groups. For instance, collectivism is one of the most significant cultural values in Indonesia. Indonesians place a high value on relationships and harmony within the community, which means that people should consider the group's needs rather than just the individual's needs when communicating with Indonesians. Respect for authority is also an essential cultural value in Indonesia. Indonesians generally show respect to those in positions of authority, such as elders or government officials.

Despite the importance of intercultural communication in Indonesia, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed. Language barriers, differing communication styles, and cultural stereotypes are some of the significant challenges in intercultural communication. Stereotypes are generalizations about a group of people based on their culture or ethnicity. They can be harmful and can lead to misunderstandings and prejudice. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid stereotypes when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds.

This review article aims to explore intercultural communication in Indonesia from various perspectives. The article examines the cultural values and communication styles in Indonesia, the challenges of intercultural communication in Indonesia, and strategies for effective intercultural communication in Indonesia. The study is based on a review of existing literature on intercultural communication in Indonesia.

Literature Review

Intercultural communication is the exchange of information between people from different cultural backgrounds. It is a process of learning and adapting to different cultural norms and values. In Indonesia, the diverse cultural background poses significant challenges in intercultural communication. This literature review examines the cultural values, challenges, and strategies for effective intercultural communication in Indonesia.

Table 1 summarises the purpose and methodology of the studies included in the review arranged chronologically from the oldest to the most recent.

No	Study/ country	The purpose(s) is/are to	Type	Phase	Methodology Participants/ document	Instrument
1	Cheng (2007)/ Taiwan	Examine teachers' understanding of culture and intercultural competence	A qualitative case study	1	Eight Taiwan EFL teachers' teaching materials	Interviews A document analysis
2	Ishii (2009)/ Japan	Investigate the effects of the integration of task-based language teaching and intercultural education on learning outcomes and learners' cross-cultural attitudes.	An experimental study (quantitative)	1	Thirty-eight Japanese high school EFL learners	A culture assimilator
3	Baker (2009)/ Thailand	Explore how intercultural awareness can be characterised in an expanding circle setting and its role in intercultural communication.	A mixed method	1 2	161 university students Seven university students	A survey Interview Diaries Observation Documents
4	Cai (2009)/ China (as cited in Qian, 2011)	Investigate teachers' beliefs about their profession, language teaching and culture teaching	A quantitative survey	1	University teachers (no information on the number of the teachers)	A survey
5	Han (2010)/ China	Explore trainers' perspectives, understanding and attitude towards ICC	A quantitative survey and document analysis	1 2	English LEP of the United States, Canada, England, Wales, and China 463 secondary English teachers	A document analysis of policies A survey (the questionnaire of the CULTNET and Byram and Risager)
6	Han and Song, (2011)/China	Investigate teachers' perceptions of ICC, their understanding of the relationship between ICC and foreign language and ICC, and the current status of intercultural education	A quantitative survey	1	30 Chinese university English teachers	A survey (adapted from Sercu et al., 2005)

7	Qian (2011)/ China	1. Provide a systematic account of the main themes and emphases of writings about culture teaching and intercultural communication studies 2. Investigate teachers' conceptions of culture, culture teaching, and their instructional practices in the classroom	An ethnographic study	1 2a 2b	8150 articles produced by Chinese researchers 36 university Teachers 19 university teachers	A survey of Literature A semistructured Interviews Classroom observations
8	Zhou (2011)/ China (see also Zhou, Xu, & Bayley, 2011)	1. Investigate teachers' willingness for, academic readiness for, beliefs ab 20 and practices about IC 2. Inquire how Chinese university EFL teachers experience and narrate their educational experience with respect to intercultural competence teaching.	A mixed method	1	201 Chinese university EFL teachers from 5 universities 8 of 201 Chinese university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers	A survey Interviews
9	Ho (2011)/ Vietnam	1. Investigate evidence of a teaching of culture in: - the curriculum frameworks - teachers' perceptions and classroom practices students' perception 2. Examine to what extent the intercultural competence of students after joining an intercultural class and students' perception of intercultural class	A mixedmethod with an intervention	1 2	12 university teachers 8 teachers 200 university students 53 students (10 groups) 1 teacher 71 students 2 of 71 students	Interviews Classroom observations Questionnaire Focus-group interviews A 9-week intervention Pre- and posttests case and 3 reflective journals case study
10	Chen (2013)/ Taiwan	10 w would a process drama syllabus help EFL learners develop critical intercultural awareness?	Ethnography Participatory action research	2	Researcher 27 junior high school students	10 -workshop classroom observation and interviews Questionnaire Video recordings Workshop journals Students' writing assignments Interviews with Chinese drama teachers

111	Tian (2013)/ China	1. Examine teachers' perceptions of intercultural competence 2. Investigate aspects of IC in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes in China and its development in instructional approaches and practices	A mixed- method	1 2	96 EFL university teachers 11 of 96 EFL university teachers	Survey Observations and one-onone interviews
12	Nguyen (2013)/	Examine teachers' beliefs and practices in incorporating culture into language teaching	A critical ethnographic study	1	15 university teachers	Interviews Classroom observation
13	Truong and Tran (2014)/ Vietnam	Investigate the use of film as an innovative approach to engage Vietnamese students in intercultural learning in the EFL classroom	A case study	1	16 Vietnamese university students	Interviews, reflective journals, video recorded class observations
14	Gandana (2014)/ Indonesia (Gandana, 2012)	Investigate teacher beliefs and understandings of the English language, of culture, interculturality and of pedagogy. Mediate the discourses, classroom practices and professional identity of these teachers	A case study	1	6 teachers at two universities	Interviewed Classroom observation A document analysis of Curriculum and policy documents
15	Doan (2014)/ Vietnam	1. Whose culture is targeted in the English teacher education programs investigated in this study? 2. What purposes are for the selection of targeting such culture? 3. What ideology informs such selection? 4. What might be the implications for the teaching of culture in English teacher education programs in Vietnam in the future?	A qualitative study	1	11 lecturers from five English teacher education programs	Semistructured interview
16	Qin (2015)/ China	1. Investigate learners' positions before they take the Intercultural English Course 2. (IEC) 3. Explicate Intercultural Language Teaching approach was applied within the Intercultural English Course (IEC)?'	A quasiexperimental project of action research (qualitative)	1	32 multi-majored undergraduate students	Questionnaire Learners' learning process worksheet Reflective journal
17	Gu (2015)/ China (see also Gu, Meng, and Li 2012)	Exp ass pro ap lore the status quo of ICC essment in English grams in China and feasible proaches to testing ICC	A quantitative study	1	39 universities in China and 30 teachers/university	Questionnaire

Previous studies on ICC in Asia by Asian scholars highlight the need for greater attention to intercultural goals in language education and for more research on this topic. This study aims to address this need by researching intercultural themes in ELT in Indonesia.

Cultural Values and Communication Styles in Indonesia

Culture is the shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices that define a group of people. Indonesia's cultural diversity is evident in the many different ethnic groups that make up the country. The Javanese, Sundanese, and Batak are the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia, but there are many other groups as well, including the Acehnese, Balinese, and Papuans.

One of the most significant cultural values in Indonesia is collectivism. Collectivism is the idea that the needs of the group are more important than the needs of the individual. In Indonesia, people place a high value on relationships and harmony within the community. Therefore, when communicating with Indonesians, it is essential to consider the group's needs rather than just the individual's needs. Another cultural value in Indonesia is respect for authority. Indonesians generally show respect to those in positions of authority, such as elders or government officials. This respect is reflected in the way Indonesians communicate with those in authority. For example, Indonesians may use formal language and titles when addressing someone in authority.

Indonesians also place a high value on indirect communication. Indirect communication is the use of nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, to convey a message. In Indonesia, it is common to use indirect communication to avoid conflict or to show respect. For example, instead of directly saying "no," Indonesians may use nonverbal cues to indicate disagreement. Indonesia is a collectivistic culture, where the community is given priority over the individual. The family and community are essential for Indonesians, and their opinions are highly valued. Indonesians tend to be indirect in their communication, and they may not always express their opinions openly. Therefore, it is essential to understand the cultural norms and values when communicating with Indonesians (Hofstede, 1991).

Respect for authority is an essential value in Indonesia. People in positions of authority, such as elders, government officials, or religious leaders, are treated with respect. It is crucial to show respect and humility when communicating with them (Hall, 1976). Indonesians have a high-context communication style, where the context and nonverbal cues are as important as verbal communication. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice when communicating with Indonesians (Kim, 1988).

Challenges of Intercultural Communication in Indonesia

Indonesia's cultural diversity poses significant challenges in intercultural communication. One of the challenges is the language barrier. While Bahasa Indonesia is the official language of Indonesia, many ethnic groups have their own languages. This can make it difficult for people from different ethnic groups to communicate effectively. Another challenge is the differing communication styles. As discussed earlier, Indonesians generally prefer indirect

communication, while people from other cultures may prefer direct communication. This can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Cultural stereotypes can also pose a challenge in intercultural communication. Stereotypes are generalizations about a group of people based on their culture or ethnicity. Stereotypes can be harmful and can lead to misunderstandings and prejudice. It is essential to avoid stereotypes. Language barriers pose a significant challenge in intercultural communication in Indonesia. Indonesia has more than 700 languages, making it difficult to communicate with people from different regions. The official language in Indonesia is Bahasa Indonesia, but many Indonesians are not fluent in it (Lin, 2014).

Differing communication styles also pose a challenge in intercultural communication in Indonesia. Indonesians have an indirect communication style, while western cultures tend to have a direct communication style. Direct communication can be seen as rude or confrontational in Indonesia, while indirect communication can be seen as vague or indecisive by western cultures (Hall, 1976).

Strategies:

Effective intercultural communication requires an understanding of the cultural norms and values of the different ethnic groups in Indonesia. It is essential to respect cultural differences and show willingness to learn about them. Language proficiency is critical in effective intercultural communication in Indonesia. Learning the local language, especially Bahasa Indonesia, can help to overcome language barriers and build trust with Indonesians.

Active listening is an essential strategy for effective intercultural communication in Indonesia. Indonesians tend to use nonverbal cues to convey their messages, so it is crucial to pay attention to nonverbal cues and listen actively. Avoiding stereotypes is also essential in intercultural communication in Indonesia. Stereotyping can lead to misunderstandings and prejudice. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid generalizations and respect cultural differences.

Indonesia's English language education policy

In Indonesia, the education system is ultimately shaped by legislation and comes in a potentially bewildering number of forms (Lauder, 2008). In August 2000, in order to clarify its status, the People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat or MPR) issued the following official hierarchy of legislation:

1. Undang-Undang Dasar 1945 (1945 Constitution)

2. Ketetapan MPR (MPR Resolution)

3. Undang-Undang (Act) or Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-Undang (Government Regulation Substituting an Act)

4. Peraturan Pemerintah (Government Regulation)

5. Keputusan Presiden (Presidential Decree)

6. Peraturan Daerah Provinsi (Regional Province Regulation)

7. Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten/Kota (Regional regency/ City Regulation) 70 (Republik Indonesia, 2011)

Within this hierarchy, I aimed to answer the first research question, "How are culture and language constructed in Indonesia's English language education policies?" by focusing on currently used documents in Indonesia:

1. The Act of the Republic of Indonesia on national education system, number 20, 2003

2. The Act of the Republic of Indonesia on flag, language, symbol, and national anthem, number 24, 2009

3. The Act of the Republic of Indonesia on higher education, number 12, 2012

4. The Government Regulation on management and implementation of Education, number 17, 2010

5. The Government Regulation, number 32, 2013 on the changes on the government regulation number 19, 2005 regarding national education standard

The author used thematic analysis as the data analysis method for their research. They used this method because it allowed them to manage large volumes of data while still retaining context and immersing themselves in the data. The author began their analysis inductively by finding patterns, themes, and categories from the data and then later searching for topics, themes, and concepts that they had identified earlier in the literature review. They used both inductive and deductive methods for their qualitative research, drawing on the literature to relate their data to findings from other relevant studies or to theoretical ideas.

The author acknowledged the strengths and limitations of thematic analysis and followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage process to conduct their analysis. They also incorporated suggestions from other scholars such as Burns (2010), Erlandson et al. (1993), Gibson and Brown (2009), Hopkins (2008), Johnson and Christensen (2012), Mackey and Gass (2012), and Saldaña (2013) to reduce the limitations and strengthen the method. The six stages of thematic analysis that the author followed were familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

To familiarize themselves with the data, the author selectively transcribed their data, reread and checked their transcriptions several times, and noted down initial ideas. They generated initial codes by coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code, and linking ideas from the data to the idea. They used a combination of a priori codes and empirical codes, starting the coding process inductively with empirical codes and using a priori codes as they drew on the literature to relate their data to the findings of other relevant studies or to theoretical ideas.

The author searched for themes by collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme, and defining a theme as a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means. They also used seven thematic or linguistic cues to identify themes: repetitions, indigenous typologies, metaphors or analogies, transitions, constant comparisons of similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, and silence/missing data. The themes themselves were emergent and influenced by questions or issues that the researcher brought to the research.

In the final stages, the author reviewed themes, defined and named themes, and produced the report. They reviewed themes by checking them against the coded extracts and the entire data set, and defined and named themes by selecting clear and concise names that accurately captured the essence of each theme. Finally, they produced the report by presenting the themes with supporting data, discussing the implications of the findings, and making recommendations for future research.

Table Nodes (Phase 1)

Parent Node	Child node	Theme
Language	• National language • Only English for international interaction • Limiting local languages • Linguistic diversity • English as a compulsory subject	The special status of English
Culture	• National culture • Unity • Cultural diversity and pluralism • Cultural differences • Respect other people • Human rights	Cultivating respect for cultural diversity through ELT

This text is an analysis of Indonesia's English Language Education Policy (ELEP) from 2003 to 2014, focusing on culture and language. Two themes were found in the policy: the special status of English and cultivating respect for cultural diversity through English Language Teaching (ELT). English was given a more "prestigious" status than other foreign languages in Indonesia's language policy. The policy emphasized that English is an international language that is very beneficial for global interaction. This is also reflected in the government regulation about the national education standard, where English is the medium of instruction for international pilot project schools.

However, there is a contradiction within and across policies relating to English as a language to learn. Although English is highlighted in the Act 20, 2003 on the national education system, government regulation regarding national education standard No. 32 and the recent 2013 curriculum do not require English to be included in the curriculum of elementary education. The recent 2013 curriculum allows English to be offered only if the schools have qualified teachers. English is no longer compulsory for non-English major university students according to Act No. 12, 2012. In a speech by the current Director-General of Higher Education, it was suggested that English would be added to compulsory general education in higher education. However, no new act or government regulation was introduced to enforce this.

The second theme found in the policy was cultivating respect for cultural diversity through ELT. The Indonesian government recognizes that English can be used to promote cultural diversity and intercultural communication. The government emphasizes the

importance of understanding and respecting cultural diversity in its policy. The government has introduced a program called the "Indonesianisasi" policy to encourage the use of the Indonesian language and culture in education. This program is implemented in primary and secondary education. However, the program does not seem to be effective as many Indonesians still prefer to use English.

Despite the government's effort to promote cultural diversity through ELT, there is still a tendency to prioritize English over local languages. The Act No. 24, 2009 on flag, language, coat of arms, and national anthem obliges Indonesians to speak Indonesian and only permits the use of other languages, foreign and local, for specific purposes. However, foreign languages, but not local languages, can be used as a medium of instruction to support students' learning. This has resulted in the marginalization of local languages in education.

In conclusion, the analysis of Indonesia's ELEP reveals that English has a special status in Indonesia's language policy. However, there is a contradiction within and across policies relating to English as a language to learn, and the varieties of English that the government supports are not always explicit. The government recognizes the importance of understanding and respecting cultural diversity, but there is still a tendency to prioritize English over local languages. The government has introduced a program to encourage the use of the Indonesian language and culture in education, but it does not seem to be effective.

Conclusion:

Effective intercultural communication is crucial in a diverse country like Indonesia. Cultural values, communication styles, and customs play a crucial role in intercultural communication. Language barriers, differing communication styles, and cultural stereotypes are some of the significant challenges in intercultural communication in Indonesia. Strategies such as language proficiency, active listening, avoiding stereotypes, and respecting cultural differences are essential for effective intercultural communication in Indonesia. By understanding the cultural norms and values of the different ethnic groups in Indonesia, it is possible to build relationships and understanding among different cultures.

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