Intercultural Communication: A Study of Normativity and Historicity from a Literature Review Perspective

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Abstract- This study is a comprehensive literature review that examines the dynamics of intercultural communication in Indonesia based on previous studies. The research focuses on two main aspects, namely normativity and historicity. Normativity encompasses the values and social norms that shape patterns of cross-cultural communication, such as customs, speaking etiquette, and social hierarchy. Meanwhile, historicity refers to the historical background that shapes relations between ethnic, religious, and regional groups, including the influence of colonialism, migration, and government policies in shaping Indonesia's multicultural landscape. Data was obtained from 15 primary and secondary sources, including nationally indexed journal articles, academic books, and official reports from international institutions such as UNESCO and the World Bank. The results of the study indicate that intercultural communication in Indonesia is greatly influenced by factors such as language, religious beliefs, social perceptions, and the complex history of interactions between groups. Tensions and harmony in communication often stem from individuals' lack of readiness to understand cultural differences. Therefore, effective communication strategies must include cultural adaptation, strengthening attitudes of tolerance, and improving cultural literacy through education and the media. This study recommends integrating an intercultural approach into education and communication training curricula to build an inclusive and mutually respectful society. These findings provide important contributions to the development of social policies and communication practices amid Indonesia's dynamic cultural diversity.

Keywords: intercultural communication, normativity, historicity, cultural adaptation, tolerance

Introduction

Indonesia is known as a multicultural country with a high degree of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. According to the Central Statistics Agency (2020), there are more than 1,340 ethnic groups and hundreds of regional languages spread across the archipelago. This diversity is both a national strength and a challenge in building effective and harmonious intercultural communication. The increasing intensity of interactions between cultural groups, driven by globalization, population mobility, and advancements in information technology, demands a deeper understanding of the dynamics of cross-cultural communication.

However, behind the potential for social integration, differences in language, values, norms, and historical backgrounds between groups often become sources of misunderstanding and social conflict. Factors such as stereotypes, prejudices, and cultural unpreparedness can hinder inclusive communication. Therefore, it is important to examine in depth how norms and values (normativity) shape patterns of intercultural communication in Indonesian society.

The aspect of normativity encompasses value systems, speaking ethics, customs, and social hierarchies that influence how individuals interact in cross-cultural contexts. Meanwhile, historicity, namely the history of intergroup relations, including colonial experiences, forced migration, and centralization policies, provides an important context for why intercultural

relations can be harmonious or tense. These two aspects are interrelated and form the foundation for understanding the complexity of intercultural communication.

This study aims to identify common patterns of intercultural communication in Indonesia. By analyzing various previous studies, this research reveals patterns of interaction that emerge in a multicultural context, including strategies of adaptation, accommodation, and resistance in communication.

In addition, this study also analyzes barriers to cross-cultural communication based on normative and historical approaches. The findings show that barriers are not only linguistic in nature, but also related to social perceptions, cultural identity, and historical tensions that have not been fully resolved.

Based on these findings, this study developed a conceptual framework for further research on effective, inclusive, and sustainable intercultural communication strategies. This framework emphasizes the importance of cultural adaptation, strengthening tolerance, and improving cultural literacy through education and the media as the foundation for social harmony in Indonesia.

Literature review

This literature review discusses the main theories in intercultural communication that are relevant to two key aspects: normativity and historicity. Intercultural communication theory generally emphasizes that cultural differences influence how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to messages in social interactions (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017). Understanding the cultural frameworks of each party is essential to avoid misunderstandings and build effective communication amid diversity.

Normativity refers to the system of values, norms, and beliefs held by a cultural group and serves as a guideline for communication. Values such as respect for elders, social harmony, or speaking etiquette indirectly greatly influence intercultural communication styles in Indonesia. This diversity of norms requires cultural awareness so that cross-cultural interactions can proceed with mutual respect and appreciation.

Cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 2001) explains how individuals gradually adapt when interacting in different cultures through learning, experience, and self-regulation. In line with this, the theory of anxiety and uncertainty management (Gudykunst, 1995) emphasizes the importance of reducing anxiety and uncertainty in cross-cultural communication to achieve mutual understanding and build trust between parties.

Meanwhile, the historical aspect highlights the influence of history on the dynamics of intercultural communication. According to Halbwachs (1992), collective memory, past conflicts, colonial experiences, and migration events shape group identities and influence how they interact with other groups. This historical background often serves as the root of prejudices or tensions that still persist today. Therefore, understanding the historical dimension is crucial for building inclusive and sustainable intercultural communication.

Research method

This study uses a library research method with a qualitative-descriptive approach to examine the dynamics of intercultural communication in Indonesia. This method was chosen because it provides a deep understanding of concepts, theories, and findings from various previous literature in a systematic manner. The research focuses on the aspects of normativity and historicity, which are considered important foundations for understanding the patterns and barriers of cross-cultural communication in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society.

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The research data was collected from 15 primary and secondary sources consisting of indexed national journal articles, scientific books, and official reports from international institutions such as UNESCO and the World Bank. These sources were selected purposively based on three main criteria: first, relevance to the themes of normativity and historicity in intercultural communication; second, providing data that is contextual to the socio-cultural reality in Indonesia; and third, having a publication date within the last 10 years, except for classic works that are still considered relevant and influential theoretically.

The data analysis technique used in this study is content analysis, which aims to identify, classify, and synthesize the main themes that emerge in the literature reviewed. The analysis process begins with an in-depth reading of each source to understand the context and arguments presented by the author. Next, the researcher identifies keywords, core concepts, and important findings related to intercultural communication, particularly in relation to values, norms, and the history of interactions between groups.

The findings from each source were then grouped into two broad categories: normativity and historicity. The normativity category includes cultural values, social norms, and communication ethics that shape patterns of intercultural interaction. Meanwhile, the historicity category includes colonial experiences, past conflicts, migration, and government policies that have historically shaped relations between groups. This grouping allows researchers to see recurring patterns and differences in perspective in the literature being studied.

After the grouping is complete, the final stage is to compare and synthesize the findings from all sources to draw coherent and in-depth conclusions. This synthesis not only describes the state of intercultural communication in Indonesia but also reveals the root causes of problems and potential solutions based on cultural and historical understanding. Thus, the methods and analytical techniques used in this research provide a strong foundation for developing a relevant and contextual conceptual framework for intercultural communication.

Results

The results of the literature review show that intercultural communication patterns in Indonesia cannot be understood separately from normative and historical factors, as the two are interrelated and influence each other. Cultural norms and values such as respect, social harmony, and hierarchy in communication shape the way people interact across groups. On the other hand, historical backgrounds such as colonial experiences, interregional migration, ethnic conflicts, and government policies also shape perceptions and attitudes towards other groups. The combination of these two dimensions creates complex communication dynamics, which can be seen in various social contexts in Indonesia.

Findings from previous studies were grouped into six main themes that represent the diversity of intercultural communication experiences. First, conflict and adaptation in interethnic marriages show how differences in family values and traditions can cause tension while also encouraging acculturation. Second, communication patterns in Islamic boarding schools reveal how religious values and scholarly traditions shape hierarchical yet inclusive interactions. Third, interactions among residents in multicultural environments highlight the importance of tolerance and daily habits in fostering harmony. Fourth, language serves as both the primary medium and a barrier to communication, particularly in the context of the dominance of the national language over regional languages. Fifth, solidarity within multicultural organizations demonstrates how shared identity can overcome cultural differences. Finally, the theme of intercultural adaptation theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the process of individual adaptation in different cultural contexts.

1. Conflict and Adaptation in Interethnic Marriage

Research by Anwar & Cangara (2017) and Abas et al. (2015) reveals that interethnic marriages in Indonesia often face complex communication challenges due to differences in culture, values, and language. These differences are not merely superficial but touch on fundamental aspects of family life, such as communication styles, decision-making, and expectations regarding gender roles. Mismatches in cultural values inherited from childhood can trigger tension in spousal relationships, especially when each party is not yet prepared to understand and appreciate their partner's background.

One concrete example is couples from Javanese and Papuan ethnic groups, who often experience differences in perception regarding the division of domestic roles. In Javanese culture, for example, women are often expected to take the lead in household matters as a form of devotion, while in some communities in Papua, men also play a very active role in domestic life. These differences in norms, if not communicated openly, can lead to dissatisfaction and conflict within the household. In addition, language barriers often serve as an initial obstacle to building a deep understanding between couples.

However, the study also shows that cultural adaptation can be an effective solution in reducing conflict. Through open communication, a willingness to learn new values, and a shared commitment to building a harmonious family, many interethnic couples have succeeded in creating inclusive and mutually respectful relationships. Historical aspects, such as the history of social tensions between groups, can indeed carry the burden of prejudice and stereotypes, but with cultural awareness and collective effort, these barriers can be overcome. This adaptation process demonstrates that intercultural communication within the context of marriage is not merely about tolerance but also about the transformative formation of a new family identity.

2. Communication in the Pesantren Environment

Hidayat's (2017) research reveals that the pattern of communication between kyai and santri in the pesantren environment is characterized by a highly hierarchical structure. Kyai, as spiritual figures and leaders of knowledge, occupy a central position and are deeply respected by the santri. Communication between the two is vertical, where santri are expected to show respect, humility, and obedience. This structure not only reflects religious authority but is also part of the character education process that emphasizes values such as tawadhu (humility) and adab (manners).

Religious norms and pesantren traditions form the main basis for regulating daily interactions. This form of communication is not limited to verbal communication, but also involves highly meaningful nonverbal aspects, such as the use of polite and formal language, bowing gestures, and the tradition of kissing the kyai's hand as a symbol of respect. Such etiquette is instilled from the moment students arrive and becomes an integral part of their social and spiritual identity. This communication pattern reflects a strong sense of normativity, where religious values and local culture merge to form hierarchical yet meaningful relationships.

However, from a historical perspective, although pesantren have traditions that have been rooted since the 18th century, their communication patterns are not static. The development of the times and technology has brought about adaptations, especially in the context of coordination and management of activities. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many pesantren began to adopt instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp to convey information, arrange online recitation schedules, or coordinate between students and administrators. Although this digital communication is more flexible, the values of respect and

politeness are still maintained in writing, such as the use of respectful words and greetings that are in accordance with etiquette. This shows that even though the form of communication has evolved, the normative and historical essence of pesantren is still preserved.

3. Intercultural Communication Among Residents

Research by Heryadi & Silvana (2013), Luthfi (2018), and Aminullah et al. (2015) shows that interactions among residents in multicultural societies in Indonesia are greatly influenced by a number of key factors, including levels of social openness, cross-cultural knowledge, and local historical experiences. Individual openness to cultural differences is a key determinant in the creation of harmonious communication. Communities that are aware of diversity and equipped with cultural literacy tend to be more capable of forming inclusive and mutually respectful relationships.

Regions with a long history as centers of education and culture, such as Yogyakarta, provide positive examples of tolerance and intercultural interaction. In Yogyakarta, encounters between various ethnicities, religions, and social backgrounds have been taking place for decades in academic, artistic, and everyday contexts. This inclusive and open environment has shaped social norms that support mutual understanding, so that conflicts based on cultural identity tend to be less frequent. Such historical factors form a strong foundation for the development of healthy and sustainable intercultural communication.

Conversely, in areas with a history of ethnic or religious conflict, such as Maluku or Poso, interactions between groups are often still influenced by collective trauma and deep mistrust. In such contexts, cross-cultural communication requires a more careful, sensitive approach that involves a process of reconciliation. Without an understanding of the historical background and active efforts to build trust, the risk of miscommunication and social tension remains high. Therefore, communication strategies in these regions need to consider the historical dimension as an integral part of efforts to strengthen inter-community relations.

4. Language as a Medium and Barrier to Communication

Lubis (2014) asserts that Indonesian plays a strategic role as a lingua franca and unifying tool in Indonesia's multilingual society. With more than 700 regional languages spread across the archipelago, Indonesian is an important solution for facilitating communication between ethnic groups, whether in the context of education, government, or daily life. This unifying function is not only practical but also symbolic, as Indonesian serves as a national identity that transcends ethnic, religious, and regional boundaries.

However, despite its widespread use, differences in dialect, intonation, and vocabulary remain barriers to cross-cultural communication. Variations in pronunciation and word choice between regions can lead to misunderstandings, especially when a term has different connotations in certain areas. For example, a word considered polite or positive in one culture may be interpreted as rude or derogatory in another region. This highlights that mastering the Indonesian language alone is insufficient without contextual understanding and cultural sensitivity to the meanings behind the words.

Historical factors have also shaped the dynamics of language-based communication in Indonesia. Language policies during the New Order era, which actively promoted the use of Indonesian in various public spheres, led to the marginalization of several regional languages and accelerated the homogenization of national communication. Although this policy succeeded in strengthening national identity, it also left its mark in the form of cultural tensions and resistance among communities who felt that their local linguistic identities had been neglected. Thus, the historical aspect remains relevant in understanding how language is not

only a tool for communication, but also an arena for the struggle for meaning, power, and identity in an intercultural context.

5. Multicultural Organizational Solidarity

Khairuddin & Sari (2019) show that multicultural organizations in Indonesia are increasingly utilizing digital technology as an efficient and inclusive means of communication. Platforms such as social media groups, instant messaging applications, and online management systems enable members from diverse cultural backgrounds to coordinate quickly, regardless of distance and time differences. This technology not only facilitates the distribution of information but also creates space for active participation by all parties, thereby fostering a sense of togetherness and solidarity within a heterogeneous organizational environment.

However, while virtual communication offers many conveniences, the study emphasizes that reliance solely on digital media has limitations, particularly in building emotional closeness and trust among members. Digital interactions often fail to capture nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, which are crucial in the Indonesian cultural context, where social context and personal relationships are highly valued. Therefore, online communication must be complemented by face-to-face meetings to ensure that cross-cultural relationships within the organization remain authentic and meaningful.

Face-to-face meetings are important for maintaining traditional values that form the foundation of social life in Indonesia, such as mutual cooperation, deliberation to reach consensus, and mutual respect. Through direct discussions and collective activities, members of an organization can strengthen social bonds, resolve conflicts through dialogue, and ensure that cultural diversity is valued in practice. By combining the advantages of digital technology and the richness of direct interaction, multicultural organizations can create an effective, inclusive communication ecosystem that is rooted in noble local values.

6. Theory of Intercultural Adaptation

Utami's (2016) research reveals that the process of intercultural adaptation does not occur instantly, but rather takes place through a series of interrelated stages, namely initial contact, adjustment, and integration. The initial contact stage is marked by encounters between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds, which are often characterized by curiosity, anxiety, or even stereotypes. At this stage, communication tends to be formal and cautious, as each party is still trying to understand the cultural norms and expectations of the other.

Over time, intensive interaction leads individuals to enter a stage of adjustment, during which cultural learning, tolerance development, and communication behavior modification take place. Normative factors such as the values of cooperation, mutual respect, and openness play an important role in facilitating this adjustment. Individuals who grow up in cultures that emphasize social harmony tend to adapt more quickly because they have been accustomed to avoiding conflict and seeking consensus. However, this process is also influenced by perceptions of other cultures, which are often shaped by collective experiences and evolving social narratives.

The final stage, integration, is achieved when individuals are able to form meaningful and mutually supportive relationships in a multicultural context without having to deny their own cultural identity. In the Indonesian context, the migration experiences of previous generations, such as transmigration or urbanization, often form the historical foundation that influences how cultural groups interact with one another. Societies with a history of peaceful coexistence tend to achieve integration more easily, while those with historical wounds require

further reconciliation processes. Thus, intercultural adaptation is the result of complex dynamics between inherited cultural values and historical experiences that shape intergroup relations.

Discussion

A comprehensive review of the literature shows that normativity and historicity are the two main pillars that shape the dynamics of intercultural communication in Indonesia. These two dimensions do not stand alone, but are interrelated and reinforce each other in influencing how individuals and groups interact. Understanding both is key to developing effective, inclusive, and sustainable communication strategies amid high cultural diversity.

Normativity refers to the values, social norms, and communication ethics that are inherited and practiced in society. Religious values, customs, and etiquette in speaking such as the use of polite language and respect for seniors shape distinctive communication patterns in various regions. These norms serve as guidelines for society in interpreting messages, determining attitudes, and responding to cross-cultural interactions, thereby influencing the quality of intergroup relationships.

On the other hand, historicity encompasses the historical background that shapes relations between cultural groups, such as collective memory, experiences of conflict or cooperation, and colonial legacies and government policies. A history of ethnic or religious tension, for example, can leave trauma that affects perceptions and attitudes of mutual trust. Conversely, regions with a history of harmony and harmonious interaction tend to have more open and tolerant intercultural communication.

Cultural diversity in Indonesia is enormous, with 1,340 ethnic groups spread across 34 provinces, according to data from the Central Statistics Agency (2020). This diversity is a source of cultural richness, but it also poses challenges in building effective communication. Differences in language, values, and social systems are often sources of misunderstanding, especially if they are not supported by adequate cultural literacy.

A UNESCO report (2019) shows that the application of cultural literacy in formal education can increase social tolerance by up to 25%. This confirms the importance of education as a means of building awareness of diversity and reducing prejudice. By understanding the cultural background of others, individuals are better able to empathize, avoid generalizations, and build respectful communication.

When compared to international research findings, such as Gudykunst & Kim (2017), the process of cross-cultural communication adaptation in Indonesia has strong distinctive characteristics. A social system based on mutual cooperation, kinship, and harmony serves as the primary foundation for intercultural interaction. These values encourage people to seek consensus, avoid open conflict, and maintain social relationships, which in turn facilitates the process of cultural accommodation compared to individualistic contexts.

However, obstacles such as stereotypes, prejudices, and language differences remain real challenges in intercultural communication. Stereotypes that have been passed down from generation to generation, especially in areas with a history of conflict, can hinder the building of trust. Therefore, progressive public policies and sustainable education programs are needed to systematically overcome these obstacles.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study provide a number of important implications for the development of cross-cultural communication programs in Indonesia. First, education needs to integrate local values and the history of intercultural interactions to build a balanced historical awareness. Second, the use of inclusive and neutral language should be encouraged to avoid the dominance of certain cultures. Third, a safe space for dialogue should be provided for communities to meet, share experiences, and build trust. Finally, the use of

digital technology must be combined with face-to-face interaction so that values such as mutual cooperation and deliberation are maintained. With this holistic approach, intercultural communication in Indonesia can become the foundation for a more peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that intercultural communication in Indonesia is a complex and dynamic process that cannot be understood separately from two main dimensions: normativity and historicity. Normativity encompasses religious values, customs, communication ethics, and social norms that guide daily interactions. Values such as respect for elders, social harmony, and mutual cooperation greatly influence how individuals convey messages and respond to differences. Meanwhile, historicity, which includes the history of intergroup relations, migration experiences, and collective memories of conflict or cooperation, shapes the perceptions and attitudes that underlie intercultural interactions, both positive and negative.

To create effective cross-cultural communication, the strategies implemented must be comprehensive and contextual. One key step is to improve cultural literacy at all levels of education, from elementary school to university. By deeply understanding cultural diversity, the younger generation can grow with awareness and mutual respect. In addition, the use of inclusive language free from stereotypes is essential to avoid marginalizing certain groups and to build a fair and equal space for communication.

It's also important for communicators, whether individuals, educational institutions, or government agencies, to pay attention to the historical background of intergroup relations, especially in areas that have experienced social tensions. This historical understanding helps prevent new tensions from arising due to insensitivity to collective trauma. Concrete efforts such as cultural exchange programs between regions also need to be strengthened to build empathy, strengthen relationships between communities, and foster a sense of togetherness. By integrating normative, historical, and practical strategic aspects, intercultural communication in Indonesia can become a means of strengthening unity in diversity.

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