
Barriers to Intercultural Communication and Efforts to Overcome Them Among Migrant Students in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

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This study discusses the barriers to intercultural communication and efforts to overcome them among migrant students in Yogyakarta. This research starts from the condition of Yogyakarta as a city of choice for pursuing higher education. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method, and the data is collected with in-depth interviews. The study results showed barriers to intercultural communication such as managing uncertainty, stereotyping, prejudice, racism, power, and language barriers. Efforts made were to postpone subjective judgments, understand and open themselves to cultural differences, empathize with communication partners, be interested in other individuals because they are unique individuals, not judge based on certain cultural or social groups, master verbal and nonverbal language, and withdrawal.

Keywords: *Barriers to Intercultural Communication, Efforts to Overcome, Migrant Students*

1. INTRODUCTION

Yogyakarta is a prominent city for students seeking to further their education. According to a survey conducted by Goodstats with 1,000 respondents, 70% preferred Yogyakarta over other cities for their studies (Khafid, 2023). Among the participants, 76.1% hailed from Java, while 23.9% came from outside the island. This significant interest reinforces Yogyakarta's status as a primary destination for students from various regions.

The presence of migrant students in Yogyakarta has significantly enriched the city's cultural diversity and dynamics. According to data from the DIY BAPPEDA as of October 25, 2023, there are 640,658 students in the region, including both local and migrant students (Khafid, 2023). This indicates that Yogyakarta has become a highly sought-after educational center for students from various areas, both within Java and beyond.

The increasing number of students from various regions with diverse cultural backgrounds has led to the term "migrant students." Migrant students are those who attend a university located outside their home region (Prima Prayoga & Handoyo, 2023). For instance, two out-of-town students from Lombok and Papua noted that the tone of voice when communicating with residents of Jogja differs significantly (Ayu, 2022). In their home regions, Lombok and Papua, people typically speak in a higher tone. In contrast, Jogja residents tend to use a softer tone. This

highlights that the choice to study outside their home region brings specific challenges for migrant students, particularly in communication.

Differences in tone of voice are one example of the communication challenges that students from different regions may encounter. Effective communication plays a vital role in helping these students adapt to their new environment. According to Lustig and Koester, communication is a symbolic process that enables individuals to create shared meaning (Mulyana, 2019). The presence of students from various regions not only enriches the cultural landscape but also introduces several challenges in intercultural communication. Intercultural communication refers to the interaction between two or more individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Liliweri, 2011).

Differences in cultural backgrounds can create barriers to communication. It is essential to understand this concept because, as De Vito (2016) states, barriers to intercultural communication are physical or psychological factors that hinder or prevent effective communication. Students from different regions often struggle to adjust to new environments, which can affect their interactions with friends and others around them. Liliweri (2011) emphasizes that the greater the degree of intercultural differences, the more opportunities we lose for establishing effective communication.

According to Liliweri (2011), many problems in intercultural communication arise from individuals being less aware and unable to find effective ways to communicate across cultures. Notable examples include the conflicts that occurred in Yogyakarta, the inter-tribal brawls in 2018, and the riots involving Papuan students in 2022 (Merdeka.com, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to address the barriers to intercultural communication through effective communication strategies. An effective communicator is someone who can interact positively with people from different races, ethnic backgrounds, and cultures (Pearson et al., 2017). Consequently, developing the ability to communicate effectively is essential for overcoming barriers to intercultural communication, particularly in culturally diverse countries like Indonesia.

Cultural diversity in Indonesia presents challenges for effective intercultural communication and mutual understanding. This diversity is evident in the multitude of ethnic groups and languages present in the country. Currently, Indonesia is home to over 300 ethnic groups, with estimates suggesting there are as many as 1,340 (Na'im & Syaputra, 2012). Additionally, the richness of Indonesia's linguistic landscape is notable, as the country boasts around 2,500 different languages—nearly double the number of its ethnic groups (Na'im & Syaputra, 2012). Thus, understanding cultural diversity is crucial for fostering intercultural communication in Indonesia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Culture

Culture is the lifestyle of a group of people; their values, beliefs, artifacts, ways of behaving, and ways of communicating (De Vito, 2016). Culture plays an important role because interpersonal competence is specific to a particular culture. Something that is proven effective in one culture may prove ineffective in another culture. In this case, there is no right and wrong principle, each is effective in its culture and ineffective outside its culture (De Vito, 2016). Cultural understanding is needed to communicate effectively in various intercultural situations. Success in interpersonal communication at work or in social or personal life depends heavily on understanding and being able to communicate effectively with people from different cultures (De Vito, 2016). According to Chang and Holt (1996), cultural differences exist across the spectrum of interpersonal communication from how someone uses eye contact to how they develop or end relationships (De Vito, 2016).

According to De Vito (2008), communication is significantly influenced by the culture in which a person is raised. Thus, culture plays a crucial role in communication, and cultural perspectives serve important functions. Here are some key points that highlight the significance of culture (DeVito, 2008): demographic changes, sensitivity to cultural differences, economic interdependency, and communication Technology.

2.2. Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to communication between individuals who have different cultural beliefs, values, or ways of behaving (DeVito, 2012). Meanwhile, according to Liliweri (2011) intercultural communication is interpersonal communication carried out by individuals with different cultural backgrounds. It is a distinctive blend of rituals, religious beliefs, thought processes, and actions that bring a group together (Pearson et al., 2017).

Interactive or transactional communication is a dynamic process. This dynamism arises from the fact that communication occurs within a living social context that evolves and changes based on time, situations, and specific conditions. In the case of intercultural communication, culture serves as a vital and dynamic force in the communication process. According to Liliweri (2011), the elements of the intercultural communication process are as follows: communicator, communicant, message or symbol, media, effect or feedback, setting and context, noise or interference.

2.3. Barriers to Intercultural Communication

According to Liliweri (2011) the greater the degree of intercultural differences, the greater the loss of opportunities to formulate a level of certainty in effective communication. Barriers to intercultural communication often appear in the form of differences in perception of cultural norms, thought patterns, cultural structures, and cultural systems (Liliweri, 2011). There are several barriers to effective communication when communicating with someone from a different culture, namely: tendencies to seek similarities, managing uncertainty, withdrawal, stereotyping, prejudice, racism, and power (Samovar et al., 2015).

2.4. Efforts to Overcome

According to Deddy Mulyana (in Sambas, 2015) to avoid misunderstandings in communicating with individuals from different cultures, a person must be an effective communicator. To become an effective communicator, individuals need to understand the communication process and the basic principles of effective communication. Efforts to achieve effective communication, especially with individuals from different cultures, can be made in the following ways:

1. Delay judgment of other people's views and behavior, because these judgments are often subjective and based on personal perceptions influenced by our culture. In other words, avoid letting stereotypes trap and mislead us when communicating with others.

2. Empathize with communication partners, try to understand their position, and use greetings appropriate to their culture.

3. Always be interested in others as unique individuals, not as members of a particular racial, ethnic, religious, or social category.

4. Master verbal and nonverbal language, and understand the value system they adhere to.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this type of research, researchers use qualitative methods. Qualitative research is research that aims to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people individually and in groups (Ismail & Ilyas, 2023). According to Boygan and Taylor (Ismail & Ilyas, 2023), qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words from people and observed behavior.

In this study, researchers collected data using in-depth interviews with semi-structured interview techniques on informants who had been determined according to the criteria of the research subjects. According to Chirban (1996) and Wahyuni (2003), semi-structured interviews are flexible, allowing researchers to ask new questions during the interview based on the responses of the interviewee (in Wahyuni, 2023). In semi-structured interviews, researchers will use an interview guide that includes several core questions that have been prepared. According to Wahyuni (2023), this interview guide helps researchers stay focused on the desired topic but does not limit the informant to a rigid format.

The sampling technique utilized in this study was purposive sampling. The size of the purposive sample is often determined by the concept of theoretical saturation, which refers to the point where the collection of new data no longer yields additional insights to address the research questions (Wahyuni, 2023). To gather information regarding intercultural communication barriers and the strategies to overcome them among migrant students in Yogyakarta, the researcher conducted interviews with six informants. These informants included three migrant students from both within and outside Java.

The data analysis technique used in this study involved several stages: Data Collection, Data Reduction, Data Display, and Conclusion/Verification. The researchers analyzed the collected data through triangulation of data sources. According to Wahyuni (2023), triangulation involves gathering data from various sources to minimize biases and better understand the different perspectives held by individuals in various roles. This approach is essential for ensuring the internal validity and credibility of the research results.

The data triangulation process follows these steps: first, sources are selected based on specific criteria related to the research subjects. Next, data is collected through in-depth interviews, during which each participant is asked the same set of questions. The interview process continues until the researcher has obtained saturated data.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Result

Cultural Differences of Migrant Students in Yogyakarta

Based on the results of interviews with informants, the most felt cultural differences in Yogyakarta are language differences. Language differences are the main obstacle to communication. The language differences felt by informants are differences in speaking style.

Cultural Differences of Migrant Students in Yogyakarta		
Region	Differences in Speaking Styles	Yogyakarta
Teraju	The tone of voice tends to be high.	Using polite language with a distinctive accent. Polite and gentle speaking style when communicating with others.
Singaraja	Tends to be rude, but polite language is often found in high-caste communities.	
Batam	Firm, straight to the point, and use slang when communicating.	
Cirebon	Loud	
Lumajang	Excited	
Bandung	Has a distinctive ending such as: "eh" or "mah", and sounds melodious when communicating	

Barriers to Intercultural Communication Students in Yogyakarta

Based on interviews with informants, researchers identified several communication barriers faced by students from different regions while studying in Yogyakarta. These barriers include language barriers, anxiety in intercultural communication, stereotypical tendencies, prejudice, varying levels of language proficiency, and racism. Each of these barriers is described as follows:

Barriers to Intercultural Communication Students in Yogyakarta	
Language Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language differences • Local people use Javanese when communicating
Anxiety in Intercultural Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intonation or tone of voice (Example: sounds high as if angry) • Misinterpreting and using words when interacting with people from different cultures

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the local language of origin when interacting in Yogyakarta
Stereotypical Tendencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepting stereotypes about culture (Such as the culture seems fierce or arrogant and impolite) Having stereotypes about people from other cultures (For example, Stereotypes about Eastern Indonesians)
Prejudice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having prejudice against people from other cultures (For example, Prejudice against people from eastern Indonesia) Receiving negative prejudice from online taxi drivers regarding the use of language that seems rude and a way of communicating that is straight to the point which is considered impolite, different from Javanese people Receiving negative prejudice when interacting with local people and getting a skeptical and less friendly attitude
Varying levels of language proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a power distance due to differences in Javanese language skills and the existence of special levels and manners when communicating with Javanese people Differences in language skills when interacting with friends who can speak Javanese seem more intimate, unlike those who do not master Javanese Feeling uninvited or marginalized when friends communicate using Javanese Receiving different treatment (for example, feeling different even though the informant can speak Javanese because they are spoken to in Indonesian)
Racism	Seeing and experiencing racism (for example, receiving physical racism while in a public space)

Student Efforts in Overcoming Intercultural Communication Barriers

Based on interviews with informants, migrant students not only have communication barriers but also efforts to overcome these problems. Ways to overcome these barriers are done by adapting or avoiding them. Migrant students efforts to overcome these communication barriers are explained as follows:

Student Efforts in Overcoming Intercultural Communication Barriers	
Learning Javanese for Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning the local language to adapt and communicate with the local community Learning Javanese by asking friends, and family, or using the internet Learning how to answer correctly and ask for meaning when interacting with interlocutors who use Javanese
Using Bahasa Indonesia	The informant uses or invites the person he is talking to to use Indonesian when communicating.
Being Open to Diverse Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be open to other cultures by understanding the differences in communication methods and learning about them before interacting with people from diverse backgrounds When communicating, focus on the individual rather than making assumptions based on their cultural background Make an effort to adapt and learn local customs, such as using the terms "mas" and "mbak" to show respect for the local culture
Introducing Their Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing one's culture and language of origin can help prevent misunderstandings. For example, explaining the meanings of certain words in a native language promotes clarity.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important to be open to one another and to learn about different cultures, which includes sharing aspects of one's own culture.
Withdrawing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawing during communication with people from different cultures may occur based on the level of interest in the conversation This withdrawal can serve as a strategy to prevent or avoid barriers to intercultural communication

- students.
- The message or symbol pertains to the content exchanged during communication. This may include the use of language and communication styles associated with the communicator's region, such as slang, brevity, a high tone of voice, and varying degrees of directness, which can sometimes come across as rude or overly enthusiastic.
- The media in this context refers to face-to-face intercultural communication.
- The effect or feedback that the communicant does is that some accept (for example: accepting the communicator's speaking style) and reject (for example: considering the communicator's speaking style not the communicant's culture).
- The setting and context of this study centers on the daily interactions among students from different areas, whether during lectures, Kuliah Kerja Nyata (KKN), or other daily activities.
- Noise or Interference in intercultural communication in this study is very diverse, which can hinder the process of intercultural communication.

4.2 Discussion

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to interactions between individuals who hold different cultural beliefs, values, or behaviors (DeVito, 2012). In the context of this study, communication occurs among students from various regions and cultures. While in Yogyakarta, these students interact not only with the local community but also with peers from other areas. As a result, each individual brings distinct beliefs, values, and behavioral norms to these interactions.

Students from other regions in Yogyakarta often experience distinct cultural differences, particularly in communication styles and language usage with older individuals. One notable difference is in the speaking styles, including tone and intonation. Typically, students from other areas tend to speak with a firm, high tone, and intonation, which can come across as rude or loud. They are often enthusiastic, concise, and may use slang. In contrast, the speaking style of people from Yogyakarta is generally soft and gentle.

This discrepancy highlights that while a particular speaking style may be effective in one culture, it may not resonate well in another. What works well in one cultural context may be ineffective in another, and there is no absolute right or wrong in this regard. Each style is effective within its own culture but may not be suitable outside of it ((De Vito, 2016)).

According to Liliweri (2011), the elements of the intercultural communication process are as follows: communicator, communicant, message or symbol, media, effect or feedback, setting and context, noise or interference:

- In this study, the communicator is a student from a different culture.
- The communicant refers to individuals from another culture who interact with these

Barriers to Intercultural Communication and Efforts to Overcome Them

In the process of intercultural communication, migrant students experience communication barriers. These communication barriers occur due to differences in regions and cultures of migrant students. The following are intercultural communication barriers experienced by migrant students in Yogyakarta and the efforts made to overcome them:

Managing Uncertainty

Uncertainty can pose challenges in intercultural communication, as it is closely linked to our natural tendency to seek out similarities (Samovar et al., 2015, p. 388). Migrant students often experience anxiety when interacting with individuals from different cultures. This anxiety stems from differences in intonation or tone compared to their native regions and Yogyakarta. Additionally, the fear of misinterpretation or the uncertainty of using their native language can heighten this anxiety during cross-cultural communication. Thus, the anxiety these students feel is a manifestation of the uncertainty that arises when they interact with people from diverse backgrounds.

To navigate this uncertainty and anxiety, migrant students employ several efforts when communicating across cultures. One approach is to explain aspects of their own culture, such as their tone of voice, to prevent misunderstandings. Furthermore, they often adapt to the local culture by using culturally appropriate greetings (for example, "mas" and "mbak"). To specifically address challenges related to language differences, migrant

students tend to be cautious in their communication, seek help from friends who have a better understanding, or opt to use Indonesian. This behavior reflects their empathy towards communication partners, demonstrating a willingness to understand their position and to use culturally relevant greetings (Sambas, 2015).

Stereotyping

Stereotypes often reflect a person's perception and can be predominantly negative. They lead to inaccurate and overly general categorizations of groups of people (Samovar et al., 2015). According to the findings, migrant students frequently encounter stereotypes, both in how they are perceived and in the stereotypes they hold about others. These forms of stereotypes are like categorizations of someone's culture of origin as fierce, arrogant, and impolite. Students from other regions not only receive stereotypes but also have stereotypes about other cultures. The forms of stereotypes given to people from other cultures are categorizations such as loud, rude, arrogant, and often cause.

While stereotypes can manifest in both negative and positive forms, negative stereotypes more commonly result in misleading generalizations about individuals from other cultures. Such overgeneralizations can adversely affect intercultural communication (Samovar et al., 2015). The negative impact highlighted in this study indicates that when students from other regions face stereotypes, it can lead to anxiety in communicating with people from different cultures.

To avoid falling into the trap of stereotyping, it is essential to delay judgment regarding others' views and behaviors, as such judgments are often subjective and shaped by one's cultural background (Sambas, 2015). Migrant students can overcome the tendency to stereotype by not judging other cultures based on assumptions. Instead, they strive to be open-minded and seek to understand cultural differences, including communication styles. Additionally, when confronted with stereotypes about their own culture, these students take the initiative to explain their cultural background. They prioritize gathering other people's opinions before forming judgments, allowing for a more informed understanding of cultural diversity.

Prejudice

Prejudice tends to lead individuals to evaluate members of other groups using the standards of their own in-group, both on an individual and collective basis (Samovar et al., 2015). Migrant students in Yogyakarta often face prejudice from online taxi drivers, who judge them based on their different language and communication styles compared to the local Javanese. These drivers apply cultural standards from Javanese society to assess those from other backgrounds.

Prejudice can arise when the characteristics of other groups or their members are viewed negatively (Samovar et al., 2015). This reflects the experiences of the migrant

students, who encounter skepticism and unfriendly attitudes from the local community while shopping, a situation that occurs frequently. This negative perception stems from an improper evaluation of different cultures, often due to a lack of information, misunderstandings, suspicion, misinformation, or other irrational feelings. Consequently, negative attitudes towards other ethnic groups or their members can easily develop (Samovar et al., 2015).

To address and overcome prejudice, migrant students from diverse cultures engage in various communication strategies. One approach is to explain their own culture, including aspects like tone and speaking style. Additionally, these migrant students make efforts to understand cultural differences. Such actions aim to mitigate the prejudices they encounter or that may exist toward their own cultures.

Racism

According to Leone, racism is the belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race (Samovar et al., 2015). This false belief allows one group to oppress another group based on race, skin color, ancestry, national origin, or perceived differences. Some migrant students receive or see racism while in Yogyakarta. Some migrant students receive racism because of their physical appearance, such as different eye or hair shapes. These differences cause migrant students to receive words that are considered oppressive (for example "woi Cina"). In addition, the form of racism that is often seen by migrant students is also a person's region of origin or physical form that causes them to be rarely spoken to and have difficulty finding boarding houses in Yogyakarta. Racism can be a major obstacle to achieving effective intercultural communication.

Migrant students overcome racism through various efforts. The efforts made are by not giving negative judgments and trying to find information about the culture. Migrant students also try to be open and firm if they have crossed the line. Migrant students are open and try to understand the racist interlocutor. However, if it is too excessive, migrant students will take a firm stance by reprimanding the individual who is being racist.

Power

When engaging in intercultural communication, imbalances of power can significantly impact the exchange. For instance, limited proficiency in a second language can create power dynamics (Samovar et al., 2015). Migrant students often perceive that their peers who speak Javanese dominate conversations and appear more socially integrated. Those who do not master Javanese may also feel marginalized. Furthermore, even students who speak Javanese may experience power differences due to regional variations, such as between East Java and Yogyakarta. A specific instance of this power disparity occurs when Javanese-speaking students are encouraged by their friends to communicate in

Indonesian, leading them to feel treated differently.

To address these power differences, particularly those related to language skills, migrant students employ various efforts. They often use Indonesian to engage more effectively. Additionally, they strive to enhance their understanding of Javanese by seeking help from friends who are fluent in the language. In certain situations, such as when friends converse in Javanese, migrant students may choose to limit their participation and speak only when necessary.

Language Barriers

Language differences pose a barrier to intercultural communication for migrant students in Yogyakarta. These barriers are faced by students from both Java and other regions. Residents often communicate in Javanese when interacting with newcomers. Moreover, even migrant students whose native language is Javanese encounter difficulties due to variations between their language and the specific Javanese spoken in Yogyakarta.

To overcome these language barriers, migrant students strive to master both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and to understand the relevant value systems (Sambas, 2015). They make efforts to learn the local language, particularly Javanese, to facilitate interactions with the local community. This learning process occurs through various means, such as online resources, and support from friends or family members who are proficient in Yogyakarta's dialect of Javanese. Additionally, students from outside the region often adjust their tone of voice to be softer and more gentle when communicating with locals. Another efforts employed by these students is to use Indonesian when interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Withdrawal

Withdrawing from conversations when interacting with people from different cultures depends on the importance of the topic being discussed. If the subject matter seems less significant, individuals might choose to withdraw from the interaction. For example, migrant students may feel inclined to withdraw when the group converses in Javanese during casual discussions. In such cases, they often prefer to step back rather than participate. Conversely, if the conversation is more serious, migrant students are likely to make an effort to understand and seek clarification on unfamiliar words. This withdrawal can be viewed as an effort to prevent or avoid barriers in intercultural communication based on the importance of the topic. While withdrawing might seem like a quick solution to avoid issues, taking a moment to gather oneself can be a constructive first step (De Vito, 2016).

However, long-term withdrawal can lead to new problems. If migrant students consistently choose to avoid participation, it could hinder their ability to engage effectively in intercultural communication, even in casual settings. Sustained avoidance can create barriers to intercultural communication, preventing students from

fully understanding and appreciating cultural differences. Engaging in regular interactions is essential for fostering intercultural understanding and mitigating communication issues.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on research results, barriers to intercultural communication such as managing uncertainty, stereotyping, prejudice, racism, power, and language barriers. Efforts made were to postpone subjective judgments, understand and open themselves to cultural differences, empathize with communication partners, be interested in other individuals because they are unique individuals, not judge based on certain cultural or social groups, master verbal and nonverbal language, and withdrawal. Through various efforts, migrant students can overcome intercultural communication barriers and have a positive experience while living in Yogyakarta.

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