

## Cross-Cultural Communication: The Role of Culture and Barriers in Intercultural Interaction

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### Abstract

*Cross-cultural communication has become an important aspect of social interaction in the era of globalization, as it allows individuals from different cultural backgrounds to understand each other and establish harmonious relationships. The research method uses a literature review, where this research uses scientific journals as a basis. This paper discusses verbal (language and accent) and nonverbal communication (gestures, distance, eye contact, and body language), differences in high-context and low-context communication styles, and communication barriers such as stereotypes, prejudices, and misunderstandings. The analysis shows that the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication depends not only on language skills, but also on cultural awareness, empathy, and the ability to adapt to social norms and nonverbal behavior. Developing effective communication competencies allows individuals to interact more productively, reduce conflict, and appreciate cultural diversity.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of globalization and increasing connectivity, intercultural interaction has become very common in education, business, and social life. Communication between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds is often referred to as cross-cultural communication (*intercultural communication*) is not only about the exchange of verbal messages, but also involves norms, values, symbols, and cultural contexts that underlie how messages are encoded, sent, received, and interpreted.

In Hariyanto (2020), Stella Ting-Toomey defines cross-cultural communication as a process of exchanging meaning between individuals or within different cultural communities (cross-cultural) to negotiate shared meaning in interactive situations. According to Stella Ting-Toomey, cross-cultural communication can be understood as a process of symbolic interaction involving individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds, where they exchange messages, interpret meanings, and negotiate shared understanding in dynamic and interactive communication situations. Ramadhan & Suryandari (2025). Cross-cultural communication is a process of exchanging information between individuals from different cultures, where the process is greatly influenced by the cultural background of each party, so that cultural differences often cause misunderstandings, miscommunication, and even conflict between members in an organization. In her view, cross-cultural communication is not just an exchange of information between cultures, but also a process of building understanding that is influenced by the values, norms, and mindsets typical of each culture involved.

In other words, cross-cultural communication requires the ability to recognize differences in worldviews, understand the cultural symbols used by the other person, and adapt communication

methods to create harmony of meaning. Ting-Toomey emphasizes that this process is a negotiation because each party brings its own cultural framework to interpret messages, so that the final agreed-upon meaning is the result of a reciprocal adjustment process between the interacting parties. Culture plays a fundamental role in the communication process. Culture provides a framework for individuals to interpret meaning, choose communication styles (e.g., direct vs. indirect), understand nonverbal cues, and determine expectations for communication relationships (such as hierarchy, timing, and etiquette). For example, a “high-context” culture tends to rely heavily on social and nonverbal context to convey meaning, while a “low-context” culture relies more on explicit verbal messages. Within this framework, culture acts as a “lens” that influences how messages are interpreted and how communication occurs.

In Mudrik (2024), research on cross-cultural communication in Indonesia is important to identify the challenges faced by society in interacting with people or groups with cultural differences. One of the main challenges is the gap in understanding between the dominant culture and minority cultures, which has the potential to cause conflict and misunderstanding. In essence, communication and culture are closely related and influence each other. The two cannot be separated because every communication process always takes place in a specific cultural context, and conversely, culture is also formed and inherited through the communication process. The strong relationship between these two elements makes the study of cross-cultural communication highly relevant, especially when applied to the context of interfaith communication.

Muhtarom et al (2024). Intercultural communication is the key to overcoming differences in language, values, and social customs, which are often a source of misunderstanding and conflict, because through effective interaction and open dialogue, it can strengthen mutual understanding and foster empathy between parties of different cultures.

Indonesia, as a multicultural country, boasts extraordinary diversity encompassing various tribes, ethnicities, languages, customs, and religions. This makes cross-cultural and interfaith interactions an unavoidable social reality. Therefore, understanding cross-cultural communication, particularly in the context of interfaith, is crucial. By understanding the cultural differences and religious values held by others, individuals can develop mutual respect, strengthen tolerance, and build harmonious social relationships within the diverse Indonesian society.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Explain the study of theories or scientifically relevant research results based on theoretical studies adapted to the author's research focus. Minimum 10 references to research results or scientific articles of international or national repute that can be accessed digitally.

Explaining the chronology or procedures for implementing research from pre-research to obtaining research results in a scientific and integrated manner in terms of scope and focus on Mandala Education Scientific Journal. In describing the chronology, it is proven by the reference sources used.

## 3. RESULTS

Cross-cultural communication is the process of exchanging messages between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. In this process, culture plays a significant role in shaping how people speak, interpret messages, and express emotions and attitudes. Each culture has its own unique value systems, norms, and communication customs, so differences in how messages are conveyed and received are likely. For example, in some cultures, speaking directly is considered polite and honest, while in others it can be seen as rude or disrespectful to the other person. Therefore, the ability to understand cultural context is key to building effective cross-cultural communication.

Zahira et al (2025) Communication barriers that arise in cross-cultural interactions include real differences in verbal language, not only vocabulary but also local terms that have their own meanings, so that they often cause confusion and different interpretations among the communicators.

Furthermore, cross-cultural communication involves more than just language, but also understanding symbols, nonverbal behavior, and social expectations within a society. Failure to understand these aspects can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, or even intercultural stereotypes.

Panggabean & Mardhiah (2025). Cultural differences in communication can give rise to cross-cultural conflicts, where differences in values, norms, language, beliefs, and world views result in misunderstandings, stereotypes, discrimination, and even social conflicts, which have implications for disrupting communication between parties.

To overcome this, individuals need to develop an open attitude, empathy, and a willingness to adapt to other people's communication styles. Iskandar (2025). In a cross-cultural context, communication barriers can also arise from cultural stereotypes and prejudices held by each party, where initial assumptions about the behavior of other cultures often trigger negative assessments and misinterpretations of the messages conveyed.

Arifin & Abuisaac (2018). The role of culture in cross-cultural communication also includes how individuals give meaning to the symbols used in interactions, so that culture shapes communication styles, and without proper cultural understanding, communication becomes less effective and full of obstacles. This shows that cross-cultural communication is not just the technical ability to speak with people from other countries, but rather social skills that require self-awareness, tolerance, and the ability to adapt to diversity.

### **Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication**

Basically, communication is a form of human interaction to express a certain thing. This interaction can take the form of agreed language and body language. Khotimah. (2024) Long before business communication practices became the foundation of business, Edward T. Hall in 1976 had described high-context culture with low-context culture. Cross-cultural communication is defined as the interaction between an individual or groups that has different cultural backgrounds. This process involves not only the transfer of information, but also symbolic understanding that involves interpretation, adaptation, and negotiation of meaning.

Musawir et al (2025) Intercultural interactions are significantly influenced by different communication norms, where high-context and low-context cultures have different ways of conveying messages, so that often the interpretation of the message is not in accordance with the original intention of the communicator. In this context, cultural differences often become a barrier, because elements such as language, values, and norms can create significant misunderstandings. For example, the way a message is conveyed verbally or nonverbally has very different meanings depending on the culture.

#### **A. verbal and non-verbal**

Verbal communication is communication that uses words, whether spoken or written, or a form of communication that uses words, whether in conversation or writing (spoken language). This communication is most commonly used in human relationships. Through words, they express their feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas, or intentions, convey facts, data, and information, and explain them, exchange feelings and thoughts, debate, and quarrel with each other. In verbal communication, language plays a crucial role. Verbal communication contains denotative meaning. The medium often used is language. Because language can translate one person's thoughts to another.

In Mustofa's (2021) Paulette J. Thomas's opinion, verbal communication is the delivery and reception of messages using spoken or written language. With the use of verbal symbols to explain messages utilizing words/language.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, in the perspective of Islamic Communication, the meaning of verbal communication can be interpreted, as stated by Khalid

Muhammad Khalid, namely, when someone wants to speak, they must ensure that, when the words expressed, they do not hurt the feelings without caring about who the person is; even though the words are considered true and real as well as defects and oddities that exist in a person, then such words mean raping justice and trying to get rid of justice.

Thus, verbal communication can be defined as a form of communication that uses language as the primary means of conveying messages, both orally and in writing. Through verbal communication, a person can express ideas, feelings, and information clearly and in a structured manner. Language functions as a symbol agreed upon to represent a particular meaning, so the effectiveness of verbal communication depends heavily on a shared understanding of these language symbols. In everyday life, verbal communication occurs in contexts such as conversations, discussions, presentations, and written messages, all of which require good language skills to determine how the message is perceived by the listener.

Verbal communication is not just about conveying words; it also reflects the values, norms, and cultural background of the speaker. In cross-cultural contexts, differences in language use often led to misunderstandings. For example, words or phrases considered polite in one culture may sound inappropriate in another. Therefore, sensitivity to the meaning of language and social context is essential for effective communication. The ability to adapt one's speaking style to the situation, the person being spoken to, and cultural norms is a form of high communication intelligence. Thus, verbal communication is not only a means of exchanging information but also a bridge to building social relationships and understanding each other more deeply.

In Pohan (2015) Agus M. Hardjana, Nonverbal communication is communication whose messages are packaged in nonverbal form, without words. In real life, nonverbal communication is used far more than verbal communication. In communication, nonverbal communication is almost automatically used. Therefore, nonverbal communication is constant and always present. Nonverbal communication is more honest in expressing what is to be expressed because it is spontaneous. Nonverbal communication is the process of conveying messages without using words, but through gestures, facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, voice intonation, physical distance, and personal appearance. This form of communication is verbal, because it appears spontaneously and reflects a person's true feelings or attitudes. For example, a smile can show friendliness, while folded arms across the chest can indicate nonverbal functions to strengthen, complement, or even replace verbal messages. Therefore, the ability to understand and interpret nonverbal messages is very important to avoid misunderstandings in the communication process.

In a cross-cultural context, nonverbal communication carries significant significance because each culture has its own distinct rules and meanings for nonverbal behavior. Hand gestures, speaking distance, or eye contact that are considered appropriate in one culture may be considered impolite in another. For example, making direct eye contact demonstrates honesty in Western cultures but may be perceived as disrespectful in some Asian cultures. These differences in interpretation often create barriers in intercultural communication. Therefore, intercultural awareness and sensitivity are essential. Therefore, a person needs to have cultural awareness and sensitivity in interpreting nonverbal signals to avoid misunderstandings. By understanding nonverbal communication in depth, individuals can interact more effectively, build empathy, and create harmonious social relationships amidst cultural diversity.

## **B. Language and acces**

Language is the primary tool in communication that allows individuals to convey ideas, emotions, and information to others. Language not only functions as a means of exchanging messages, but also reflects the cultural and social identity of its speakers. Each community group has a unique language system, including vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure that reflect their mindset and cultural values. According to Wibowo (2001), language is a system of

meaningful and articulate sound symbols (produced by the vocal organs) that are arbitrary and conventional, which are used as a means of communication by a group of humans to express feelings and thoughts. Krishnendu & Aadithyan (2023). Language barriers are a dominant factor in cross-cultural communication because language is an extension of culture, so differences in understanding words or symbols have the potential to cause misunderstandings that can stop the flow of communication effectively.

An accent is the way a person pronounces words in a language, which is usually influenced by the speaker's geographic, social, or cultural background. Accents arise because each social group has different phonetic habits and intonation patterns.

- Gestures: Gestures or body movements are usually used to convey messages without using words. Gestures that are often used include waving, pointing, or nodding the head. Rahayu (2025) Body Movements, in nonverbal communication, kinesics or body movements include eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and body posture. Body movements are usually used to replace a word or phrase, for example, nodding to say something, illustrating or explaining something, or showing feelings.
- Distance: Proxemics is a type of nonverbal communication that involves distance during communication. This distance or space in communication is usually determined by how familiar and comfortable you are with the person you're speaking to.
- Eye contact: Eye contact also plays an important role in nonverbal communication. The way a person looks, stares, and blinks can reveal various emotions. For example, when you meet someone, you like or respect, your blink rate will usually increase, and your pupils will dilate. Ayu (2020) Eye contact also refers to something called gaze, which includes a state of direct eye contact between people (always on the face) while talking.
- Body language: Body language is a form of nonverbal communication that uses body movements, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact to convey messages or feelings without using words. Body language often occurs spontaneously and reflects a person's emotional state, such as happiness, anger, nervousness, or confidence. For example, a smile can indicate friendliness, while crossed arms can be interpreted as a closed or defensive attitude. In everyday communication, body language serves to strengthen or even replace verbal messages. Often, when words and body language are not in harmony, people tend to trust the meaning conveyed through body language, because it is considered more honest and natural. a type of language that uses body movements as a tool to convey thoughts or feelings

### **high context dan low context**

Long before business communication practices became the foundation of business, Edward T. Hall in 1976 had described high-context culture with low-context culture. Low-context culture is characterized by low-context communication. The messages conveyed tend to be verbal and explicit, the speaking style is direct, straightforward, and frank. In low-context culture, communicators are more about saying what they mean and meaning what they say. The nature of low-context communication is fast and easy to change because it does not unite the group.

High-context cultures are characterized by high-context communication. Most messages are implicit, indirect, and not overt. Messages tend to be hidden in the speaker's nonverbal behavior. Some examples include voice intonation, hand gestures, body postures, facial expressions, eye contact, and even physical context (grooming patterns, room layout, artifacts, and so on). Verbal statements can differ from or contradict nonverbal messages. Nevertheless, high-context communication is enduring. Changes appear slower and are bound to the group using it. Because of this, people in high-context cultures are more aware of cultural filtering processes than those in low-context cultures.

### **Communication barriers of stereotypes, prejudices, and misunderstandings**

Andrik Purwasito (Purwasito 2003: 228) defines stereotypes as individual traits based on cultural context. According to Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2014: 203), stereotypes are complex forms of grouping that mentally organize an individual's experiences and direct their attitudes toward certain people. It is a way of organizing your images into a definite and simple category that you use to represent a group of people.

*First* Stereotypes hinder communication because they create generalizations based on prejudice and inaccurate information, which then shape negative perceptions, lead to misunderstandings, and trigger conflict. These barriers affect both individuals and groups, preventing the establishment of meaningful relationships and hindering the effective delivery of messages and the reception of accurate information. *Second* Prejudice hurts intercultural communication because it encourages stereotypes that simplify complex cultural information, leading to exclusion and reinforcing differences between groups. This often leads to harmful interactions and undermines good communication and relationships between people from different cultural backgrounds.

Prejudice can also be detrimental when interpreting emotions and body language. Matsumoto (2006) points out that individuals in low-context cultures, in contrast to high-context cultures, are more open to expressing their emotions and making judgments based on them. On the other hand, LaFrance and Mayo (1978:77) state, "Emotional expression involves both cultural similarities and differences. It is not simply the case that some emotions are universal and others are culturally specific."

*Misunderstandings* occur when the message conveyed by the sender is not understood or interpreted differently by the recipient, making it a serious obstacle in effective communication. Misunderstandings can arise from various factors such as ambiguous language use, cultural differences, prejudice, physical disorders, or lack of attention and empathy from the communicating parties.

### **Developing effective communication competencies**

Developing effective cross-cultural communication competencies requires an integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills. This effort involves not only improving language skills but also a deep understanding of the values, norms, and interaction patterns that exist within various cultures. Several strategic steps serve as an important foundation for building these competencies.

#### a) Multicultural Education and Cultural Literacy

The first important strategy is to integrate multicultural education into the national curriculum. Multicultural education can help the younger generation understand and appreciate the cultural diversity that exists in Indonesia. By providing a deeper understanding of other cultures, students can learn about different values, traditions, and norms, as well as the impact of these differences on communication. Furthermore, higher cultural literacy will reduce the potential for conflict and misunderstandings arising from cultural differences.

#### b) Tolerance of diversity

Pluralism comes from the English word plural, meaning diversity in society; many other things must be acknowledged. Terminologically, pluralism is the attitude of recognizing and appreciating, respecting, maintaining, and developing a plural or diverse situation. Phenomenologically, religious pluralism is a fact related to the history of religions that displays a plurality of traditions and various variants of tradition. Philosophically, religious pluralism is related to a theory regarding the relationship between various conceptions, perceptions, and responses regarding the reality of divinity. Pluralism is an effort to create social relations between religious communities in order to create harmony between them. Developing effective cross-cultural communication also involves tolerance of diversity.

Tolerance is key to creating a harmonious society, especially in countries with many cultural differences.

c) Dialogue between social and cultural groups

Open dialogue between different social and cultural groups is a crucial strategy for improving cross-cultural communication. Indonesia, which comprises various ethnicities and religions, requires space for each group to speak and understand the views of others. Discussion forums or intergroup meetings facilitated by the government or civil society organizations can create opportunities to exchange ideas, listen to experiences, and address differences more constructively. Such dialogue not only builds better understanding but also fosters mutual respect between cultures, which ultimately enriches social interaction in Indonesia.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Intercultural communication is a complex process involving differences in language, symbols, and social norms that influence how messages are constructed and interpreted. Differences in verbal and nonverbal communication, such as accent, gestures, interpersonal distance, and eye contact, have the potential to distort meaning if not accompanied by adequate cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, the existence of stereotypes, prejudices, and perceptual biases is are significant barriers that reduce communication effectiveness and hinder objective understanding. These findings emphasize the importance of developing cross-cultural communication competencies through multicultural education, strengthening the value of tolerance, and fostering open dialogue between social groups. In the context of a multicultural society, successful cross-cultural communication is not solely determined by linguistic ability, but primarily by cultural awareness, empathy, and the adaptive ability to negotiate meaning. All of these processes play a crucial role in building harmonious and sustainable social relationships.

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