

The influence of Indonesian students' intercultural communication style on harmonious relations with Malaysian students at the Faculty of Communication and media studies, UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the dynamics of intercultural communication between Indonesian and Malaysian students at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, UiTM Shah Alam, which is influenced by differences in language, norms, and nonverbal expressions. The objective was to analyze the influence of intercultural communication styles on harmonious relationships among students. The research was conducted using quantitative methods with a questionnaire survey of students from three study programs selected proportionally, then analyzed using simple linear regression and ANOVA tests. The results showed that intercultural communication style and communication accommodation had a positive effect on building harmonious relationships, as indicated by increased friendly interaction, mutual respect, and minimal potential for conflict. Other findings indicate that there are no significant differences in perceptions between study programs regarding the importance of intercultural communication. Thus, it can be concluded that intercultural communication competence plays an important role in creating social harmony in a multicultural academic environment, while emphasizing the need for communication adaptation strategies and more inclusive campus policies.

Keywords: intercultural communication; communication accommodation; harmonious relations.

1. Introduction

The student exchange program is an effective way to enhance cross-cultural understanding and broaden perspectives, particularly in overcoming communication challenges. One example is the Indonesian student exchange program to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam in Malaysia. UiTM is the largest university in Malaysia, with its main campus located in Shah Alam, attracting many international students. In the 2024/2025 academic year, the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies at UiTM Shah Alam hosted seven Indonesian exchange students in the fields of broadcasting, new media, and advertising. This program allows Indonesian students to explore broadcasting techniques and adapt to Malaysia's academic and cultural environment. With the participation of these students, the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies UiTM Shah Alam strengthens its position as a learning hub for broadcasting that supports international academic and cultural exchange.

According to (Milyane et al., 2023), intercultural communication occurs between people from different cultural backgrounds, and cultural diversity makes communication essential for social integration. Therefore, it is important for people from different cultural backgrounds to be able to understand messages and create positive perceptions. In Malaysian culture, nonverbal communication is strongly influenced by cultural and religious values. Thus, body language and personal space must align with social norms to maintain harmony.

However, the cultural diversity that characterizes this student exchange program does not always guarantee smooth communication among participants. Indonesian and Malaysian students often face complex communication challenges, particularly due to differences in nonverbal communication. For example, Indonesian students tend not to return a smile when passing by someone, whereas in Malaysia, smiling when meeting others is a common practice considered polite and friendly (Moulita, 2018). Moreover, the use of negatively connoted verbal terms, such as the word "*Indon*," is often perceived as derogatory and offensive to Indonesian students, which also creates tension between groups.

Beyond communication differences, social stereotypes also affect student interactions. Malaysian students studying in Indonesia are often assumed to come from wealthy families, leading to different treatment in university administrative matters (Aini & Lusdiana, 2020). On the other hand, there is a

perception that Malaysians are friendlier to their fellow citizens than to foreign students, which often leads Indonesian students to face uncomfortable questions or stereotypes (Elfareza, 2021). A study titled *"Conflict Reconciliation Strategies between Indonesia and Malaysia: A Cultural Approach to Pseudo-Nationalism on Social Media"* was conducted by Absherina Olivia Agatha and a team of Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) students under the Humanities Social Research Student Creativity Program (PKM-RSH). This research examined the rising negative sentiment between Indonesians and Malaysians from 2016–2021 using netnography and data analysis from Google Trends and social media such as Twitter. The findings indicate that symbolic conflicts between the two countries are amplified by provocative media coverage and biased nationalism, fueling pseudo-nationalism among netizens. If left unaddressed, these barriers can lead to awkwardness or even small conflicts in daily interactions. Conversely, if students are able to adopt an adaptive communication style sensitive to local cultural norms, the likelihood of establishing harmonious relationships is greatly increased. An open, inclusive, and respectful communication style is the key to building productive relationships among students from different cultural backgrounds (Tempo, 2021).

Indonesian students' intercultural communication style greatly influences how they are understood, accepted, and treated by Malaysian students. When students communicate openly, respect local cultural norms, and adopt an inclusive attitude, intercultural interactions become friendlier and more rewarding. Conversely, a closed communication style or lack of cultural sensitivity can create emotional distance and reinforce existing prejudices. In this context, language is not only viewed as a linguistic system but also as a tool for constructing social meaning. As a result, language is always tied to and embedded in culture (Zamhari et al., 2025). This dynamic creates a complex communication environment in which Indonesian students must adjust their communication style in order to interact effectively within Malaysia's academic and social settings.

In this context, UiTM students showed great interest in Indonesian culture. They actively interacted and even attempted to use the Indonesian language in daily conversations. This enthusiasm especially since it was their first time interacting with Indonesian students reflects an intriguing intercultural communication dynamic. However, challenges remain, as experienced by Malaysian students at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. Communication barriers emerged due to cultural and language differences (Yanti, 2019). Research highlights that differences in dialect, cultural expression, and communication style were the main factors hindering interaction between Malaysian and local students. In practice, Malaysian students used Indonesian as the medium of communication, but differences in intonation, terminology, and nonverbal habits still caused misunderstandings.

To overcome these barriers, Malaysian students employed various strategies, such as increasing communication with local students, participating in cross-cultural campus activities, and learning local culture through direct social interaction. This adaptation led to a model of intercultural communication that is adaptive, involving reciprocal adjustments between two distinct cultures. Openness, tolerance, and willingness to understand cultural differences are the most crucial keys to effective and harmonious communication.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to build cross-cultural awareness and adaptive communication skills. In a multicultural campus environment, students are required not only to grasp academic material but also to adapt to the norms, communication styles, and values upheld by peers from other cultures. Understanding cultural differences not only enhances the quality of interpersonal relationships but also supports the creation of a conducive, collaborative, and inclusive academic climate. The rationale of this research is based on the vision of modern universities striving to produce globally-minded graduates who can engage in effective and respectful cross-cultural collaboration.

This study aims to examine the extent to which intercultural communication styles and communication accommodation strategies contribute to harmonious relationships between Indonesian and Malaysian students. Using a quantitative approach with a survey method, this research seeks to provide an empirical picture of communication patterns among students across nations. The findings are expected to show how the ability to adjust communication styles and accommodation strategies plays a role in fostering friendly, respectful, and low-conflict interactions. Thus, this study is not only academically significant but also offers practical contributions to improving the quality of social interaction among international students.

Previous literature shows that intercultural communication competence is a key factor in building respectful interactions. Intercultural communication theory emphasizes that understanding different symbols, languages, and norms forms the foundation for creating healthy social relationships. Meanwhile, communication accommodation theory explains how individuals adjust their communication styles, both verbally and nonverbally, to bridge differences and achieve mutual understanding. Based on this theoretical foundation, this study develops the hypothesis that the higher the intercultural communication competence and communication accommodation strategies of students, the better the quality of harmonious relationships formed between students across countries. Therefore, this research is expected to enrich the field of intercultural communication studies and serve as a reference for the development of campus policies that support the creation of an inclusive and harmonious multicultural academic environment.

2. Method

This study employs a quantitative method with a survey approach to analyze the effect of intercultural communication (X) on harmonious social relationships (Y) among students at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, UiTM Shah Alam. This approach was chosen because it can objectively describe relationships between variables through data collection from a large number of respondents. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to measure indicators of intercultural communication, communication accommodation strategies, and students' perceptions of social harmony within a multicultural academic environment.

The research population comprised 690 Malaysian students at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, UiTM Shah Alam, including 245 Broadcasting students, 150 New Media students, and 295 Advertising students. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation from each study program. From this population, 100 respondents were selected with proportional distribution: 36 students from Broadcasting, 22 from New Media, and 42 from Advertising. This distribution is considered to fairly represent the population.

Data were collected online via Google Forms, distributed to students through class WhatsApp groups for ease of access. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), N (Neutral), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree), to capture respondents' level of agreement with each statement. The study variables include: (1) Intercultural communication (X), defined as students' ability to adapt verbal and nonverbal communication styles across cultural differences; and (2) Harmonious social relationships (Y), defined as the condition of interactions among students characterized by mutual respect, cooperation, and minimal conflict.

All questionnaire items were tested for validity and reliability using SPSS through item validity tests and Cronbach's Alpha (standard > 0.7) to ensure the instrument's accuracy and consistency. The collected data were then analyzed using normality tests, linearity tests, and simple linear regression to examine the effect of intercultural communication (X) on harmonious social relationships (Y). Additionally, an ANOVA test was used to determine whether there were differences in perceptions among students from the three study programs. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the contribution of intercultural communication in fostering harmonious social relationships within a multicultural academic environment.

3. Instrument and Discussion

3.1. Instrument Test Result

3.1.1. Validity Test

Validity, derived from the term *validity*, refers to the extent to which a measurement instrument accurately and precisely performs its intended function (Ramadhan et al., 2024). In this study, validity was tested by comparing the correlation value (r-count) of each item with the r-table value. With 100 respondents and a significance level of 5%, the r-table value obtained was 0.361. A statement item is considered valid if its r-count is greater than 0.361 and the significance value is less than 0.05. This criterion serves as the basis for assessing the appropriateness of the questionnaire items as research measurement tools.

Table 1. Validity Test Results for Variable X1: Intercultural Communication Style

Statement	r-Count	r-Table	P (Sig.)	Description
P1	0,764	0,361	0	Valid
P2	0,732	0,361	0	Valid
P3	0,817	0,361	0	Valid
P4	0,654	0,361	0	Valid
P5	0,634	0,361	0	Valid
P6	0,736	0,361	0	Valid
P7	0,687	0,361	0	Valid
P8	0,676	0,361	0	Valid

Based on the validity test results for variable X1 (Intercultural Communication Style), all statement items P1 through P8 had r-count values greater than the r-table value (0.361) with a significance of 0.000 (<0.05). This indicates that all items are significantly correlated with the total score and are considered valid, making them suitable as research measurement instruments.

Table 2. Validity Test Results for Variable X2: Communication Accommodation

Statement	r-Count	r-Table	P (Sig.)	Description
P1	0,784	0,361	0	Valid
P2	0,761	0,361	0	Valid
P3	0,769	0,361	0	Valid
P4	0,872	0,361	0	Valid
P5	0,744	0,361	0	Valid

The validity test for variable X2 (Communication Accommodation) shows that all items P1 through P5 had r-count values greater than the r-table value (0.361) with a significance of 0.000 (<0.05).

Table 3. Validity Test Results for Variable Y: Harmonious Relationships

Statement	r-Count	r-Table	P (Sig.)	Description
P1	0,799	0,361	0	Valid
P2	0,779	0,361	0	Valid
P3	0,809	0,361	0	Valid
P4	0,862	0,361	0	Valid
P5	0,794	0,361	0	Valid

The validity test results for variable Y (Harmonious Relationships) indicate that all items P1–P5 had r-count values greater than the r-table value (0.361) with a significance of 0.000 (<0.05), and are therefore considered valid and appropriate for use as research instruments.

3.1.2. Reliability Test

According to (Sanaky et al., 2021), reliability testing aims to ensure that the research instrument can be trusted as a data collection tool and can accurately reveal the intended information. This test was conducted on all questionnaire items that had already been validated to ensure that the measurement tool is consistent. An instrument is considered highly reliable if it obtains a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.7, indicating that the items in the questionnaire are strongly correlated and suitable for research purposes.

Table 4. Reliability Test Results for Variable X1: Intercultural Communication Style

Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Requirement	Description
8	0,857	0,7	Reliabel

Table 5. Reliability Test Results for Variable X2: Communication Accommodation

Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Requirement	Description
5	0,844	0,7	Reliabel

Table 6. Reliability Test Results for Variable Y: Harmonious Relationships

Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Requirement	Description
5	0,866	0,7	Reliabel

The reliability test results indicate that all research variables are reliable. Variable X1 (Intercultural Communication Style) has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.857, X2 (Communication Accommodation) 0.844, and Y (Harmonious Relationships) 0.866. All values are above 0.7, confirming that the instruments are consistent and suitable for use as research measurement tools.

3.2. Classical Assumption Test Results

3.2.1. Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to ensure that the research variables are normally distributed, which is a prerequisite for regression analysis. In this study, normality testing was performed using SPSS version 26 with the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov method, Lilliefors correction, and Monte Carlo simulation for 100 data samples. The test was conducted on the independent variables (X1 and X2) and the dependent variable (Y) with a significance level of 0.05. Data are considered normal if the Asymp. Sig. value is greater than 0.05.

Table 7. Results of Normality Test of Variable X1 against Y

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		100
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	1.89294702
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.103
	Positive	.063
	Negative	-.103
Test Statistic		.103
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.011 ^c
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig.	.225 ^d
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound
		Upper Bound
		.214
		.236

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

Table 8. Results of Normality Test of Variable X2 against Y

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test			Unstandardized Residual
N			100
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean		.0000000
	Std. Deviation		2.23467655
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.048
	Positive		.036
	Negative		-.048
Test Statistic			.048
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			.200 ^{c,d}
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig.		.967 ^e
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.963
		Upper Bound	.972

a. Test distribution is Normal.
b. Calculated from data.
c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.
d. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
e. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 299883525.

The results showed that the residual data for both independent variables are normally distributed. For X1 vs. Y, the Monte Carlo significance value was 0.226 (>0.05), indicating normal distribution. Similarly, X2 vs. Y had a Monte Carlo significance of 0.967 (>0.05), also indicating normal distribution.

3.2.2. Linearity Test

The linearity test aims to determine whether two or more variables have a significant linear relationship. This test is commonly used as a prerequisite for correlation or linear regression analysis (Setiawan & Yosepha, 2020).

To determine the linear relationship between variables, the results of the linearity test are presented in the following table:

Table 9. Linearity Test Results

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Hubungan Harmonis * Gaya Komunikasi Antarbudaya	Between Groups	(Combined)	689.121	15	45.941	12.959	.000
		Linearity	632.168	1	632.168	178.321	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	56.953	14	4.068	1.148	.331
	Within Groups		297.789	84	3.545		
	Total		986.910	99			

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Hubungan Harmonis * Akomodasi Komunikasi	Between Groups	(Combined)	557.099	12	46.425	9.397	.000
		Linearity	492.526	1	492.526	99.694	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	64.573	11	5.870	1.188	.307
	Within Groups		429.811	87	4.940		
	Total		986.910	99			

The linearity test results show that the relationship between harmonious relationships and intercultural communication style has a significance value of 0.331, while the relationship between harmonious relationships and communication accommodation has a significance of 0.307. Both values are greater than 0.05, indicating that the relationships between variables are linear and meet the linearity assumption.

3.2.3. Simple Linear Regression Test

Simple linear regression is a statistical method used to determine the relationship and effect of one independent variable on one dependent variable. Its main purpose is to see whether changes in the independent variable can predict or influence the dependent variable (Nurhaswinda et al., 2025).

Table 10. Results of Simple Linear Regression Test of Variable X1 against Y

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2.253	1.354		1.664
	Gaya Komunikasi Antarbudaya	.558	.042	.800	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Hubungan Harmonis

Table 11. Results of Simple Linear Regression Test of Variable X2 against Y

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	4.309	1.601		2.692
	Akomodasi Komunikasi	.789	.080	.706	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Hubungan Harmonis

The simple linear regression results indicate that both independent variables significantly affect harmonious relationships. Intercultural communication style (X1) has a significance of 0.000 (<0.05) with a regression coefficient of 0.558 and Beta of 0.800, meaning that increases in intercultural communication style positively and strongly enhance harmonious relationships. Communication accommodation (X2) also has a significant effect with a significance of 0.000, a regression coefficient of 0.789, and Beta of 0.706, indicating a positive effect that is moderately strong, slightly lower than X1. Thus, both intercultural communication style and communication accommodation contribute importantly to creating harmonious relationships among students.

3.3. ANOVA Test (One-Way ANOVA)

The One-Way ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in perceptions among students from the three study programs Broadcasting, New Media, and Advertising across three variables: intercultural communication style, communication accommodation, and harmonious relationships.

Table 12. Descriptive Statistics Results of One-Way ANOVA Test

		Descriptives							
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Gaya Komunikasi Antarbudaya	BROADCASTING	36	31.72	5.348	.891	29.91	33.53	9	40
	NEW MEDIA	22	33.41	2.955	.630	32.10	34.72	25	37
	ADVERTISING	42	30.86	4.275	.660	29.53	32.19	23	40
	Total	100	31.73	4.526	.453	30.83	32.63	9	40
Akomodasi Komunikasi	BROADCASTING	36	19.86	3.681	.614	18.62	21.11	5	25
	NEW MEDIA	22	20.32	2.056	.438	19.41	21.23	15	24
	ADVERTISING	42	19.62	2.326	.359	18.89	20.34	14	23
	Total	100	19.86	2.828	.283	19.30	20.42	5	25
Hubungan Harmonis	BROADCASTING	36	19.86	3.773	.629	18.58	21.14	5	25
	NEW MEDIA	22	20.41	2.520	.537	19.29	21.53	13	24
	ADVERTISING	42	19.83	2.921	.451	18.92	20.74	13	24
	Total	100	19.97	3.157	.316	19.34	20.60	5	25

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher, 2025

Descriptive statistics show differences in the average perception scores among the three programs. For intercultural communication style (X1), New Media students had the highest average score (33.41), followed by Broadcasting (31.72) and Advertising (30.86), indicating that New Media students tend to have higher perceptions of intercultural communication style. For communication accommodation (X2), New Media students also had the highest average (20.32), followed by Broadcasting (19.86) and Advertising (19.62), although the differences were relatively small. For harmonious relationships (Y), the three groups had nearly similar scores: New Media (20.41), Broadcasting (19.86), and Advertising (19.83), indicating relatively even perceptions across the programs.

Table 13. Results of the Variance Homogeneity Test
Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Gaya Komunikasi Antarbudaya	Based on Mean	2.060	2	97	.133
	Based on Median	1.852	2	97	.162
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.852	2	64.602	.165
	Based on trimmed mean	1.986	2	97	.143
Akomodasi Komunikasi	Based on Mean	2.061	2	97	.133
	Based on Median	2.007	2	97	.140
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.007	2	72.903	.142
	Based on trimmed mean	2.028	2	97	.137
Hubungan Harmonis	Based on Mean	.738	2	97	.481
	Based on Median	.483	2	97	.618
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.483	2	84.310	.619
	Based on trimmed mean	.651	2	97	.524

The homogeneity of variance test using Levene's Test showed that all variables had significance values above 0.05: 0.133 for intercultural communication style, 0.133 for communication accommodation, and 0.481 for harmonious relationships.

Table 14. ANOVA Test Results

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gaya Komunikasi Antarbudaya	Between Groups	94.027	2	47.013	2.358	.100
	Within Groups	1933.683	97	19.935		
	Total	2027.710	99			
Akomodasi Komunikasi	Between Groups	7.057	2	3.528	.436	.648
	Within Groups	784.983	97	8.093		
	Total	792.040	99			
Hubungan Harmonis	Between Groups	5.453	2	2.726	.269	.764
	Within Groups	981.457	97	10.118		
	Total	986.910	99			

The One-Way ANOVA results indicate no significant differences in perceptions among the three study programs for the three variables. The significance values were 0.100 for intercultural communication style, 0.648 for communication accommodation, and 0.764 for harmonious relationships, all greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' perceptions from the three study programs are relatively similar regarding intercultural communication style, communication accommodation, and harmonious relationships.

4. Discussion

This study shows that intercultural communication style and communication accommodation significantly influence the establishment of harmonious relationships between Indonesian and Malaysian students at UiTM Shah Alam. Adjusting communication according to local cultural norms and the ability to accommodate both verbally and nonverbally strengthens social interaction and reflects important intercultural competence in a multicultural environment.

These findings support intercultural communication theories, particularly Hall's high-context culture concept and Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory. Indonesian students who adapt to the communication patterns typical of Malay culture, such as speaking politely or using local expressions, can create more harmonious interactions. Although the contribution of communication accommodation is slightly smaller than that of intercultural communication style, it remains an important factor that opens the space for social acceptance and togetherness.

The ANOVA results also indicate no significant differences between study programs, suggesting that the challenges of intercultural communication are experienced evenly across all students. This emphasizes that the quality of communication, rather than academic background, determines the creation of harmonious social relationships. Therefore, intercultural communication competence needs to be developed collectively to support an inclusive and respectful learning environment.

4.1. Influence of Intercultural Communication Style on Harmonious Relationships

Analysis shows that intercultural communication style has a significant effect on harmonious relationships, with a significance value of 0.000 and a regression coefficient of 0.558. Indonesian students who communicate in line with Malay cultural norms using polite, indirect, and empathetic language tend to be more easily accepted in the Malaysian academic community.

According to (Syarizka et al., 2021), Ting-Toomey's (2004) Face Negotiation Theory explains that individuals in conflict situations use facework strategies influenced by their native culture, self-construal, and face concern. This aligns with Malay cultural characteristics that emphasize politeness, harmony, and indirect communication. When Indonesian students adapt to these values, they tend to be more accepted and appreciated, which ultimately enhances relationship harmony.

Indonesian students seeking harmonious relationships adopt this communication style by avoiding overly direct commands and using inclusive, gentle approaches. For example, in group discussions, they might say: "If you feel comfortable with this part, can you take it? But if it's difficult, I can help." This reflects supportive facework, where intentions are expressed while maintaining the interlocutor's feelings and relational harmony.

Malaysian students, whose culture emphasizes politeness and social harmony, generally convey disagreements indirectly, offering alternative suggestions without outright rejection. Statements such as "That's a good suggestion, but I thought of another approach..." exemplify preventive facework, aiming to prevent situations that might threaten someone's social image.

Indonesian students also adjust their communication similarly, avoiding overly direct speech and using collaborative approaches. For example, when a peer has not completed a task, they ask politely: "Can we discuss this assignment a little?" or "If anyone has difficulty, let's work on it together." This is a form of restorative facework, preserving relationships while expressing needs or expectations.

Nonverbal facework is also evident, including smiling, slightly bowing the head when greeting, or allowing pauses in discussions, reflecting respect for others. Both Indonesian and Malaysian students practice these forms of facework to create comfortable, egalitarian, and respectful interactions.

Appropriate facework strategies, aligned with cultural type and individual orientation, help reduce conflict and foster harmonious intercultural relationships (Al Azis & Irwansyah, 2021).

Research by (Moulita, 2018) identifies significant barriers in intercultural communication among students, particularly due to ethnic and cultural differences. This study reinforces the assumptions of intercultural communication theory, especially regarding language differences, stereotypes, misinterpretation of nonverbal cues, judgment tendencies, and anxiety often experienced during cross-cultural interactions. Indonesian and Malaysian students exchanging educational experiences face communication challenges from accent, language, and differing cultural expectations in academic and social contexts. Awareness, openness, empathy, and stereotype reduction are key to overcoming these barriers.

The positive influence of intercultural communication style on harmonious relationships indicates that adjusting communication strategies is a key approach to overcoming barriers such as language differences, stereotypes, anxiety, and nonverbal misunderstandings. Adopting a more open, empathetic, and contextual communication style considering local politeness norms, choosing neutral words, and avoiding offensive expressions enhances both message delivery and mutual trust and respect.

Language and accent barriers that previously caused confusion or anxiety can be alleviated by collaborative communication, such as clarifying meaning with simple words, asking for clarification politely, or patiently repeating information. Culturally sensitive communication also reduces judgment tendencies, focusing on understanding rather than imposing perceptions. Communication style, therefore, is not merely a technical method but an adaptive strategy demonstrating openness and maturity in intercultural interactions.

Thus, these findings support not only the conceptual framework of intercultural communication theory but also provide practical approaches for handling communication challenges among students from different cultural backgrounds. Culturally sensitive communication prevents conflict, strengthens social cohesion, and fosters a sense of belonging in multicultural campuses. Intercultural communication competence is therefore a core necessity for achieving harmonious interactions in global education.

Indonesian students' intercultural communication includes delivering messages politely, choosing appropriate words, controlling body gestures, and understanding the social and cultural context of Malaysia. By aligning their communication style with Malay values emphasizing politeness, social order, and harmony, Indonesian students can create a positive perception among local students. Contextual and empathetic communication fosters mutual respect in multicultural campus environments.

4.2. Influence of Communication Accommodation on Harmonious Relationships

Communication accommodation has an even greater influence on harmonious relationships than intercultural communication style, with a regression coefficient of 0.789 and significance of 0.008. It reflects students' flexibility in adjusting speech style, facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language according to their interlocutor's cultural expectations.

This finding aligns with the social harmonization theory (Aprina & Suryani, 2020), which describes harmonious, peaceful, and low-conflict relationships formed through effective interpersonal communication. Students able to communicate openly, empathetically, and supportively can adjust, build closeness, and foster a harmonious social environment. Non-academic activities, such as campus organizations and group events, strengthen these positive intercultural interactions.

At UiTM Shah Alam, this communication is evident in daily interactions both inside and outside the classroom. Students actively try to understand each other, adjust speech styles, adhere to local politeness norms, and maintain a positive, respectful communication tone. When misunderstandings occur, they use polite language to clarify, preventing potential conflicts early. Communication here considers both the message and the interlocutor's emotions and social image.

Informal interactions hanging out in campus cafés, dining together, or casual chats in dorms also play a crucial role in strengthening intercultural relationships. Such interactions allow freer self-expression, sharing cultural habits, local jokes, and adaptation experiences. Over time, classmate relationships may evolve into closer friendships, breaking down stereotypes and fostering genuine understanding.

Indonesian students adapting communicatively, such as using Malay or local terms, adjusting tone, and aligning communication style, are more socially accepted by Malaysian students. Accommodation demonstrates cultural sensitivity and builds psychological closeness, supporting comfortable, harmonious social relationships. (Deswita & Loisa, 2024) argue that verbal and nonverbal communication must be conducted simultaneously to be effective.

The study conducted by (Nadia & Fauzana, 2024) indicates that Malaysian students studying in Riau employed communication strategies oriented toward cultural adaptation through communication accommodation. The findings support Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, which posits that individuals adjust their communication style to achieve interaction effectiveness while maintaining cultural identity. In this context, Malaysian students frequently used convergence strategies, adapting language, intonation, and even local habits such as regional vocabulary and the communication style of Indonesian students in Pekanbaru to facilitate social and academic acceptance. They actively participated in social interactions and demonstrated adaptive efforts through daily communication, both verbal and nonverbal. However, divergence strategies also appeared when students consciously maintained distinctive cultural identity traits, such as continuing to use Malay with a regional accent

when interacting with fellow Malaysian students. This represents a form of assertive accommodation, aimed at balancing social integration with the preservation of one's cultural identity. The study emphasizes that the success of cultural and social integration for foreign students heavily depends on their ability to flexibly adjust communication in accordance with the social context they face.

These findings are also in line with Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, which identifies three main processes in communication accommodation:

a. Convergence

Convergence is a communication strategy in which individuals attempt to adjust their speech style, language, intonation, and even nonverbal behavior to resemble that of their interlocutor. Indonesian students who employ convergence such as speaking with a softer tone or using Malay terms when communicating with Malaysian students demonstrate efforts to build social closeness and a positive impression. This strategy effectively fosters connectedness, reduces social distance, and facilitates harmonious cross-cultural relationships.

b. Divergence

Conversely, divergence occurs when individuals consciously maintain their original communication style and do not adjust to the cultural norms of their interlocutor. For instance, Indonesian students who continue using their regional speech style or Bahasa Indonesia in social interactions without adapting may be seen as preserving their cultural identity. While this strategy can reflect strong self-identity, if not accompanied by cultural sensitivity, divergence may create psychological distance and reduce harmony in cross-cultural student interactions.

c. Overaccommodation

Overaccommodation is an excessive form of communication adjustment that appears insincere, condescending, or even offensive. For example, Indonesian students who overdo a Malay accent or stereotypically mimic local communication styles out of context may create negative perceptions among Malaysian students, as the behavior seems inauthentic or forced.

These three processes are highly contextual and influenced by culture, social status, and individual perceptions in interactions. Indonesian students, as "guests," tend to use convergence as a form of adaptation and respect toward the "host," whereas Malaysian students may exhibit subtle divergence to assert their local identity. Beyond verbal aspects, nonverbal communication such as maintaining appropriate physical distance, using subtle gestures, and avoiding direct eye contact is also an important part of accommodation in Malay culture (Rahman, 2023). When students can adjust appropriately to these nonverbal communication norms, harmonious social relationships are more easily established. Therefore, conscious, proportional, and culturally appropriate communication accommodation serves as a bridge that strengthens social integration and harmony.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, respondents were limited to students of the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies at UiTM Shah Alam, so the findings cannot yet be generalized to all Indonesian students in Malaysia. Second, data collection using an online questionnaire via Google Forms yielded only closed quantitative data, limiting the capture of in-depth cross-cultural communication dynamics. Third, the study focused on only two variables: intercultural communication style and communication accommodation, although harmonious relationships can also be influenced by other factors such as personality, educational background, national identity, and campus policies. Fourth, the quantitative approach used did not allow exploration of students' subjective experiences; therefore, qualitative methods such as interviews or participatory observation are recommended for future research.

Recognizing these limitations, further studies are expected to include a broader respondent base, employ more diverse methodological approaches, and examine additional variables to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of intercultural communication in higher education.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that intercultural communication styles and communication accommodation significantly influence the harmonious relationships between Indonesian and

Malaysian students at UiTM Shah Alam. Students who are able to adapt to Malay cultural values through polite communication, indirect expressions, and appropriate nonverbal cues are more easily accepted socially. Although communication accommodation also plays an important role, intercultural communication style has been shown to have a more dominant influence in fostering harmonious relationships. The ANOVA test results indicate no significant differences in perceptions among study programs, suggesting that the importance of intercultural communication is understood consistently across all students. These findings affirm that adaptive communication competence serves as the key foundation for achieving social harmony in multicultural higher education settings.

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