

The Role of Cross-Cultural Communication in Enhancing Student Collaboration in a Multicultural Academic Environment

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Article Information		Abstract
Submission date	4 January 2025	Research aim: To analyze the experiences and challenges faced by Management Program students in cross-cultural collaboration and the efforts to overcome these obstacles within an academic environment. Design/Method/Approach: This study employs a qualitative method using in-depth interviews with cross-cultural student informants at Nusantara PGRI Kediri University. Research Finding: Cultural diversity presents challenges in communication differences but also offers opportunities for the development of knowledge and soft skills. Theoretical contribution/Originality: This study provides new insights into cross-cultural communication and solutions for addressing the dominance of majority cultures. Practitioner/Policy implication: The findings can be used to create an inclusive academic environment through cross-cultural communication training. Research limitation: The study is limited to the academic context and does not cover cross-cultural interactions outside the classroom. Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, cultural diversity, communication challenges
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1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the 195 countries recognized as a multicultural nation, boasting the largest number of ethnic groups in the world, ranking second after India. Indonesia has more than 300 identified ethnic groups, specifically 1,340 ethnic communities, according to data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) census in 2010. (*Indonesiabaik.id*, October 14, 2024) [1]. Currently, Indonesia is in the era of globalization, where intercultural interactions are increasingly common, especially in academic settings. Students from various cultural backgrounds often meet and collaborate in the same learning space, creating significant opportunities to enhance academic quality. However, Agnes (2024) stated that this diversity sometimes poses challenges that could potentially threaten national disintegration. This issue arises due to differentiation in anthropological factors such as socio-cultural aspects, language, and ways of thinking within society [2]. Therefore, in a campus environment, students' ability to adapt and collaborate effectively with individuals from diverse cultures becomes crucial for academic success and the development of social skills. Cross-cultural interactions on campus not only enrich students' understanding of diversity but also enhance their ability to communicate and collaborate with people from different backgrounds.

In this context, understanding the barriers to cross-cultural communication becomes

essential, especially since cultural differences can influence how individuals interact and collaborate in academic environments. These barriers often arise due to cultural and communication differences between individuals. Previous research by Patawari (2020) highlighted the importance of cross-cultural understanding in fostering effective academic interactions. The study found that students lacking adequate cross-cultural communication skills tend to struggle in actively participating in academic activities [3]. Rudy (2022) also stated that these challenges include aspects such as language differences, social norms, and cultural values that affect how students communicate with one another. Cross-cultural understanding also proves beneficial in enhancing tolerance and skills necessary in the professional world [4]. Hariyanto and Dharma (2020) mentioned that cross-cultural communication is a comparative analysis that prioritizes the relativity of cultural activities. It plays a role in adapting to new socio-cultural values through communication processes that focus on international relations without creating new cultures [5]. In the context of cross-cultural learning, research by Khoirunnisa and Sunarya (2023) demonstrated that cross-cultural communication serves as a bridge for introducing and adapting to local cultures, ultimately strengthening students' cultural diplomacy skills [6]. Although some studies have explored this issue, further research is needed to specifically examine how students experience and overcome barriers in cross-cultural collaboration.

Nusantara PGRI Kediri University (UNP Kediri) is one of the multicultural educational institutions in Indonesia. This university provides a diverse academic environment where students from various ethnic, cultural, and regional backgrounds come together to learn and grow. A total of 2,245 new students joined in 2023, spread across several study programs at UNP Kediri. The study program with the highest number of students is the management program, which admitted 472 students in 2023.

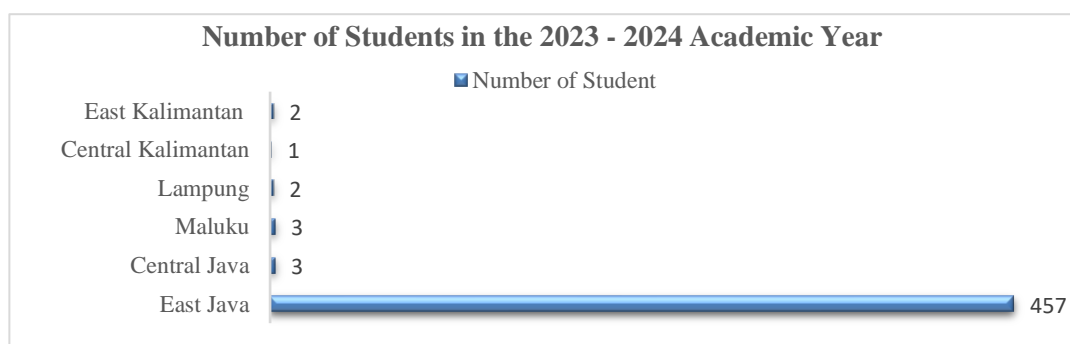


Figure 1: Number of Students in the Management Program for the 2023/2024 Academic Year

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on the data, it is known that the majority of management program students for the 2023/2024 academic year come from East Java Province, with a dominant number of 457 students. In contrast, students from outside East Java Province are significantly fewer, such as those from East Kalimantan Province with only 2 students, Central Kalimantan Province with

1 student, Lampung Province with 2 students, Maluku Province with 3 students, and Central Java Province with 3 students. This indicates that students from outside East Java Province are a minority in the management program. This condition requires these students to adapt quickly to collaborate as effectively as students from East Java Province. Cultural differences, habits, and communication styles often pose major challenges in building effective collaboration.

In the management program, nearly all courses require students to work in groups, such as in courses like Entrepreneurship, Human Resource Management (HRM), Marketing Management, and Business Communication. This highlights the importance of collaboration and communication skills for successfully completing group tasks. Students are expected to set aside differences, develop tolerance, and create effective communication strategies to achieve common goals. Thus, the diversity of students from various regions is not merely a challenge but also an opportunity to enrich ideas and perspectives in the collaborative process.

1.1. Statement of Problem

Although management program students interact with peers from various cultural backgrounds, cross-cultural collaboration in academic activities often faces multiple challenges. These challenges range from language differences to variations in communication styles and social norms. Such difficulties can hinder students' participation in academic activities and reduce the effectiveness of cross-cultural collaboration. Therefore, the main issue addressed in this study is: What are the experiences and challenges faced by Management Program students in cross-cultural collaboration, and what efforts are made to overcome these challenges so that collaboration in the management program can run effectively.

1.2. Research Objectives

This article aims to analyze and understand the experiences of communication and collaboration with students from different cultural backgrounds, as well as to identify the various challenges or obstacles that arise during the collaboration process. In addition, this research is also intended to identify the efforts made to overcome challenges in participating in cross-cultural academic activities.

2. Method

This method used in this research is the qualitative method. According to Sugiyono (2020:9), this research method is defined as a method used to study objects in their natural state, where the researcher serves as the key instrument in the study [7]. The research location at Nusantara PGRI Kediri University, with the research period spanning four months, from September 2024 to December 2024.

The data collection technique employed by the researcher is in-depth interviews to understand the experiences and challenges faced by management program students in cross-cultural collaboration and the efforts made to overcome challenges during academic participation. Interviews were conducted to directly obtain information about specific

conditions or situations, complement scientific research, and acquire data that can influence particular circumstances or parties [8].

This research uses both primary and secondary data. Primary data refers to data sources that directly provide data to the data collector. In contrast, secondary data refers to data sources that indirectly provide data, such as data from books, journals, literature, websites, and other supporting materials [9].

In selecting informants, the researcher must ensure that the chosen informants meet the criteria for informant selection. According to Kamayanti (in Ismayantika & Zulistiani, 2020), there are 5R in determining informants, which include several qualifications: a) *Relevance*, the informant must have a direct connection to the subject and object of the research. b) *Recommendation*, the researcher can seek or request recommendations from trusted individuals to determine informants. c) *Rapport*, there should be a close relationship between the researcher and the informant to gather deeper information. d) *Readiness*, an informant must be willing to be interviewed without coercion. e) *Reassurance*, the researcher must ensure that the informant can answer questions without fabrication [10].

The criteria for informants set by the researcher include 7 individuals. These informants consist of 1 individual who is the head of the management study program and representatives from various provinces, each represented by 1 student from the management program class of 2023/2024. These students come from East Java, Central Java, Maluku, Lampung, Central Kalimantan, and East Kalimantan Provinces. The student informants are categorized as management program students from the 2023 class currently in their third semester. The following is the informant data used in this research:

Table 1. Informant Data

Name	Category	Description
Bu Restin Meilina	Head of Management Study Program	Informant 1
Alfina	Student from Central Kalimantan Province	Informant 2
Wa Ode Nurlita	Student from Maluku Province	Informant 3
Novia	Student from East Kalimantan Province	Informant 4
Ani Tri	Student from East Java Province	Informant 5
Rahmawati	Student from Central Java Province	Informant 6
Elsa	Student from Lampung Province	Informant 7

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The data validity technique in this study uses source triangulation to verify and compare data obtained from interviews. The interview questions are as follows:

1. How is your experience in communicating and collaborating with students from different cultural?
2. What challenges or obstacles do you face when collaborating with students from different cultural backgrounds?
3. How do you overcome the challenges or obstacles when collaborating with students from different cultural backgrounds?

The data analysis follows the approach proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes three stages: data reduction, where essential and primary data are consolidated and unnecessary data are discarded; data presentation, where the reduced information is organized and presented in an easily understandable manner, highlighting interrelations; and conclusion drawing, where the data collected is interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions [11].

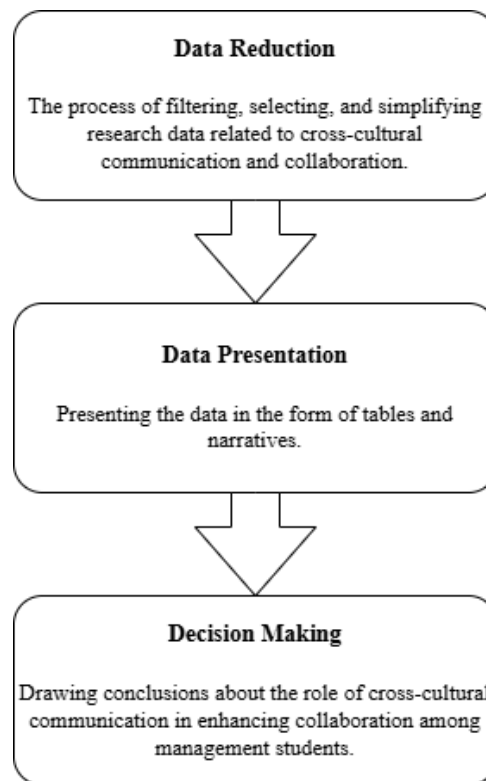


Figure 2: Qualitative

Data Analysis

Source: Primary Data, 2024

3. Result and Discussion

Result

The interview results based on the questions that have been prepared are presented in the following table:

- 1) To understand the experience of communication and collaboration.

Question: How is your experience in communicating and collaborating with students from different cultures?

Table 2. Interview Responses Regarding Experiences of Communicating and Collaborating with Students from Different Cultures.

Description	Jawaban
Informant 1	When I teach, I don't use full Indonesian, Miss; I often mix it with Javanese. Well, when I mix it with Javanese, intending to make the atmosphere more relaxed, some students seem to struggle to understand me. At that point, I

felt, “Oh no, poor them.” So, I ended up explaining in full Indonesian, which felt a bit stiff to listen to.

Informant 2 It’s fun, Miss. I get to learn about other people’s languages and cultures too. Sometimes, they share things that don’t exist here but are common in their area. It’s exciting and interesting to exchange stories with them.

Informant 3 It’s really fun, Miss. Honestly, I’m very happy to have many friends from different backgrounds; I can even learn their languages too.

Informant 4 It’s both happy and sad, Miss. The happy part is making friends from many regions, but the sad part is that sometimes they use too much Javanese in conversations.

Informant 5 It’s mostly fun, Miss, having friends from different regions. At first, it felt a bit awkward because of the different communication styles, but that’s what made it fun for me.

Informant 6 For me, I can directly interact with my friends, and it’s really fun to make friends from various regions, Miss. It also enhances my communication soft skills.

Informant 7 The friends in class are different from those during orientation week, Miss. Honestly, I have a bit of difficulty understanding their language. But they adjust by using Indonesian in class, and it turns out they also want to learn Lampung language, which makes it exciting.

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on table 2, all informants stated that cross-cultural interactions in the classroom present challenges, such as language differences and communication styles, but also offer opportunities for mutual learning, broadening perspectives, building relationships, and developing communication soft skills. The informants felt that this diversity creates an inclusive, engaging, and enjoyable atmosphere, making it a meaningful experience.

2) To find out the challenges in collaborating.

Question: What are the challenges or barriers in collaborating with students from different cultures?

Table 3. Interview Responses Regarding the Challenges of Collaborating with Students from Different Cultures.

Description	Answer
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- Informant 1** Regarding the challenges faced by students from different cultures, in my opinion, they will have a hard time coming to a mutual decision during discussions. It could be that the Javanese students try to impose their opinions because they feel like they have more friends, and the non-Javanese students might not be brave enough to voice their opinions or intentions.
- Informant 2** The biggest challenge is usually when trying to align communication styles. There have been moments where group dynamics were influenced by this, as it was difficult to communicate.
- Informant 3** Sometimes, cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings. Some of my friends on campus also aren't fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, so during group discussions, I sometimes have trouble understanding their language.
- Informant 4** The challenge for me in communication is that many of them already know each other, whereas I'm from another island. Also, because of cultural differences, the way people make friends and socialize might cause issues, like when my opinions aren't well received during discussions.
- Informant 5** There have been times when I didn't get a good grade, maybe because in collaborations, they were too passive, and when I tried to talk to them, they would just stay silent and not provide any input due to miscommunication.
- Informant 6** The challenge is in communication and differing opinions. I can understand their language, but sometimes I don't fully grasp the meaning.
- Informant 7** It's also difficult to communicate in group settings because they are used to speaking in Javanese.
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Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on table 3, all informants stated that the main challenge in cross-cultural interaction is communication differences, which lead to difficulties in reaching agreements during group discussions, miscommunication, and misunderstandings. Students from majority cultures tend to dominate, while those from outside the region often feel less confident in expressing their opinions. This can affect the dynamics of collaboration and result in suboptimal group work outcomes.

3) To identify efforts made.

Question: How are efforts made to overcome obstacles or challenges in collaborating with students from different cultures?

Table 4. Interview Responses Regarding Efforts to Overcome Barriers or Challenges in Collaborating with Students from Different Cultures.

Description	Answer
Informant 1	The efforts that both lecturers and students must undertake should not be culture-centric or focused solely on one ethnic group or culture. In fact, cultural differences should be seen as a means to gain other experiences.
Informant 2	The solution is to learn to be flexible and more open. If direct communication doesn't work, we should try finding other ways that are more suitable. The key is to adapt to each other and learn from differences.
Informant 3	The solution is to understand how others think more deeply. We can engage in conversations about their cultural backgrounds to better understand how they approach certain issues.
Informant 4	We need to learn how to make friends and socialize, especially since I'm a minority, and also learn to accept differences in collaboration.
Informant 5	We need to be assertive in groups, establish agreements for communication, and be open to making friends with anyone, as cultural differences actually make it easier to gain experiences.
Informant 6	We should frequently ask questions to blend in with students from other places.
Informant 7	Building relationships and learning languages is important. Joining organizations like Hima, BEM, or student clubs (UKM) can help gain experiences and allow us to learn new languages.

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on table 4, the informants emphasize the importance of flexibility, openness, and adaptation in overcoming cross-cultural challenges, with solutions such as mutual understanding, learning from differences, and expanding relationships through organizations. Cultural differences are seen as an opportunity to gain experience, which in turn leads to more effective communication and harmonious collaboration.

Discussion

Pada In this study, the data obtained from informants indicate that cultural diversity in academic interactions has two complementary sides: challenges and opportunities. The primary challenges identified include language barriers, communication styles, and thought patterns that often lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and difficulties in reaching agreements during group discussions. These findings support Patawari (2020), who showed

that students lacking adequate cross-cultural communication skills tend to face obstacles in actively collaborating in academic activities. This is also in line with Rudy (2022), who stated that language differences and cultural values influence the dynamics of cross-cultural communication.

However, this study also reveals the positive side of cultural diversity, namely as a means for mutual learning, broadening perspectives, and building inclusive relationships. The informants viewed diversity as an opportunity to develop communication soft skills, such as flexibility and adaptability, which are essential for collaboration in academic environments. These findings also support Khoirunnisa and Sunarya (2023), who highlighted cross-cultural communication as a bridge for adapting to local cultures and strengthening students' cultural diplomacy. Additionally, solutions proposed by the informants, such as understanding the cultural backgrounds of peers, building relationships through organizations, and creating more effective communication, reflect Hariyanto and Dharma's (2020) view on the importance of adaptation through cross-cultural communication to foster harmonious socio-cultural understanding.

In contrast to this study's findings, Agnes (2024) emphasized the potential threats of diversity, which may lead to national disintegration due to social, cultural, linguistic, and cognitive differentiation. These differing results may be influenced by the research focus, where Agnes's study is more oriented toward the macro-scale impact of diversity and potential socio-political threats, while this study focuses on micro-level experiences in academic classroom environments.

This study reaffirms that cultural diversity, although challenging, can also bring significant positive impacts when approached appropriately. With flexibility, openness, and adaptability, students can utilize diversity as a means to enhance cross-cultural understanding, build harmonious collaboration, and expand social skills relevant to global demands.

Thus, despite some similarities in findings, the differences in results provide new insights into the challenges of cross-cultural communication in academic settings, particularly concerning the role of majority cultural dominance and the lack of confidence among students from diverse regions.

4. Conclusion

This study finds that cultural diversity in academic interactions presents two main aspects: challenges and opportunities. The most significant challenges include differences in language, communication styles, and thought patterns, which can lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and difficulties in reaching consensus during group discussions. On the other hand, cultural diversity also provides opportunities to broaden perspectives, build inclusive relationships, and develop soft skills such as flexibility and adaptability. The findings of this study show that diversity can be an asset if managed with the right approach in an academic environment.

This study makes an important contribution to the academic field by deepening the understanding of the role of cross-cultural communication in academic settings. Practically, it

offers insights for lecturers and educational institutions to create an inclusive environment through effective diversity management. The novelty of this research lies in its detailed focus on students' experiences in managing cultural diversity in the classroom, as well as the concrete solutions it offers, such as fostering mutual understanding, expanding relationships through organizations, and establishing effective communication patterns. This study also provides policy implications to support cross-cultural communication training and promote tolerance in education.

However, this study has limitations, including its focus on a specific academic context, which may not fully represent all cultural environments or broader societal settings. Additionally, the research approach does not deeply explore interpersonal dynamics outside the classroom. Future research agendas could expand this scope by examining cultural diversity in various social, economic, and professional contexts, as well as exploring more specific strategies for managing the dominance of majority cultures in cross-cultural interactions.

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