

TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' STRATEGIES FOR BULDING SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH LOCAL STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH MAKASSAR

Nurilmi Aulia Amar¹,

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, indonesia,

✉ (e-mail) nurilmiaulia@bg.unismuhmakassar.ac.id

Nurdevi Bte Abdul²,

² Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, indonesia,

✉ (e-mail) nurdevi@unismuh.ac.id

Herlina Daddi³

³ Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, indonesia,

✉ (e-mail) herlinadaddi@unismuh.ac.id

| Receive in | Revised in | Accepted in |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 16 May 2026 | 29 June 2026 | 13 June 2026 |

ABSTRACT

The increasing number of international students has created multicultural interaction in higher education environments. However, in the context of higher education in Indonesia, language differences, local accents, and the use of regional expressions often pose challenges for international students. Previous research has focused more on language barriers and cultural adaptation, while studies on transcultural communication and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) as a communication tool are still limited especially in Indonesian multicultural higher education contexts. Therefore, this study investigates transcultural communication strategies and communication challenges experienced by Thai students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach involving three Thai university students from different study programs who were purposively selected due to their active engagement in multicultural academic interactions and their varying levels of Indonesian language proficiency. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and field notes, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that participants employed strategies such as asking for clarification, mixing languages, using peer assistance, gestures, and repeated interactions to maintain communication. Furthermore, the study identified the use of AI as a novel strategy for understanding contextual meaning and cultural expressions during interactions. Overall, the findings indicate that transcultural communication was facilitated through processes of adaptation, negotiation of meaning, social support, and the use of digital technology

Keywords: Transcultural communication, international students, communication strategies, AI-assisted communication

INTRODUCTION

Journal of English Education Vol.12 No. 1 (2026)

<http://journal.upp.ac.id/index.php/JEE>

P-ISSN: 2459-9719, E-ISSN 2597-7091

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30606/jee.v12i1.4606>

Currently, international student mobility continues to increase, leading to more multicultural environments in higher education institutions. Students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact in shared academic environments.

In Indonesia, several universities, including Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, have increasingly accommodated international students from Southeast Asian countries.

Differences in language, communication styles, local expressions, and regional accents often create difficulties for international students in both academic and social interactions, affecting their classroom participation and communication confidence. Previous studies have shown that international students frequently face communication barriers, limited classroom participation, and challenges in academic and social adjustment in host countries (Andrade, 2021; Yeh & Swinehart, 2020). These findings highlight that communication difficulties are not only linguistic issues but also involve social and psychological adaptation processes in new academic environments.

Traditionally, communication in multicultural settings has been explained through the perspective of intercultural communication, which tends to view cultures as separate and relatively fixed based on national or

group identities. Intercultural communication focuses on understanding differences between cultures and building competence to communicate across them. However, recent studies suggest that communication practices in real-life interactions are more fluid and dynamic than this perspective assumes.

In contrast, the concept of transcultural communication provides a more relevant framework for understanding contemporary interaction. Transcultural communication views communication as a process of moving across and beyond cultural boundaries, where meaning is continuously negotiated rather than fixed. Baker (2018) explains that transcultural communication emphasizes flexibility, cultural mobility, and the co-construction of meaning during interaction. Similarly, Dervin and Machart (2019) highlight that communication in multicultural contexts is not static but constantly shaped by interactional situations, identities, and contextual negotiation.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the experiences of Thai students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, where communication involves continuous negotiation of meaning across linguistic, cultural, and contextual differences in both academic and social interactions

Recent literature further suggests that communication in multilingual environments is highly dynamic, where individuals use linguistic and semiotic resources such as language mixing, gestures, and contextual adaptation to negotiate meaning during interaction (Baker, 2022; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019). This shows that successful interaction is not only determined by language proficiency but also by the ability to negotiate meaning in real-time communication.

In addition, communication strategies play an important role in supporting interaction in multicultural classrooms. Students often employ strategies such as clarification requests, code-mixing, peer assistance, and non-verbal communication to maintain interaction. Sato and Ballinger (2016) emphasize that interaction strategies are essential in maintaining communication flow when learners face linguistic limitations. Meanwhile, Sert and Walsh (2022) highlight that classroom interaction is shaped by participation patterns, turn-taking, and how participants manage understanding during learning activities. Peer interaction has also been identified as an important factor in helping international students build confidence and academic engagement (Lee & Kim, 2019; Tai & Chen, 2023).

Despite the growing body of research on international student communication, most

studies still focus on language barriers, intercultural adjustment, and classroom anxiety. Fewer studies have examined how communication strategies operate across different interaction contexts different interaction contexts, particularly within Indonesian higher education settings.

Another emerging gap in recent research is the role of AI-assisted communication in transcultural interaction practices. Currently, artificial intelligence (AI) tools have increasingly played a role in supporting communication and learning in multicultural higher education environments. One participant specifically used Gemini AI to support understanding of contextual meanings, unfamiliar expressions, and conversational interpretation during interaction. Kasneci et al. (2023) explain that AI has started to influence educational communication practices by helping learners process information more contextually.

However, research on AI-assisted communication as part of transcultural communication strategies remains limited, especially in the context of Indonesian higher education. Therefore, this study aims to explore transcultural communication strategies used by international students when interacting with local students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar and to identify the communication challenges they experience

in multicultural classroom environments. Based on initial observations, international students from Thailand experience several communication difficulties, particularly related to limited Indonesian vocabulary, regional accents, and the use of informal local expressions.

However, they also demonstrate adaptive strategies such as clarification requests, language mixing, peer assistance, non-verbal communication, and the use of AI applications to support understanding during communication.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERTURES

A. Transcultural Communication

1. Definition of Transcultural Communication

Transcultural communication refers to a dynamic process of communication that transcends fixed cultural boundaries, where meaning is continuously negotiated and co-constructed through interaction.

Unlike intercultural communication, which often views culture as separate and stable, transcultural communication understands culture as fluid, hybrid, and constantly evolving through interaction, making it more suitable for examining multilingual and multicultural classroom interaction. Baker (2019) explains that transcultural communication involves flexible use of linguistic and cultural

This study contributes to existing literature by highlighting that AI-assisted communication is emerging as a new transcultural communication strategy. This study contributes to existing literature by highlighting AI-assisted communication as an emerging transcultural communication strategy. Beyond functioning as a translation tool, AI helps students understand contextual meaning, interpret cultural expressions, and increase confidence during multicultural academic interaction.

resources, where individuals shift between cultural frameworks depending on communicative needs. Communication is therefore not a transfer of fixed meaning but a process of adaptation and negotiation.

Dervin (2020) adds that transcultural communication is a reflexive process where individuals critically adjust their communication based on context, avoiding rigid cultural assumptions.

Zhu (2021) emphasizes that in higher education contexts, transcultural communication is essential because students co-construct meaning through negotiation, clarification, and multimodal communication.

2. Characteristics of Transcultural Communication

According to Baker (2022) and Dervin (2020), transcultural communication is characterized by:

- a. Fluid cultural identity across contexts
- b. Hybrid use of language and communication resources
- c. Co-construction of meaning during interaction
- d. Context-based adaptation of communication strategies
- e. Reflexive adjustment during communication

These characteristics show that communication in multicultural academic environments is dynamic and interaction-based rather than rule-bound

3. Transcultural Communication in Academic Context

In academic settings, transcultural communication plays a central role in classroom interaction among students from diverse backgrounds.

Zhu and Knickmeier (2021) explain that transcultural academic communication involves collaborative meaning-making where students use clarification, repetition, and paraphrasing strategies.

Baker (2021) emphasizes that language in academic settings functions as a flexible communicative tool rather than a fixed system.

Dervin and Simpson (2022) highlight that transcultural communication also involves emotional and psychological dimensions such as anxiety management and confidence building.

In this study, transcultural communication is used as the main framework because Thai students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar continuously negotiate meaning, adapt language use, and occasionally utilize AI-assisted communication tools such as Gemini AI to support understanding during classroom interaction

B. International Students and Local Students

Recent studies in Southeast Asian higher education contexts also show that multilingual students frequently negotiate meaning through flexible language use, peer support, and digital communication assistance in multicultural classrooms.

In Indonesian higher education settings, communication challenges often emerge from differences in regional expressions, classroom participation styles, and multilingual interaction practices.

1. International Student

International students are individuals who study outside their home countries and

undergo academic, linguistic, and sociocultural adaptation.

Andrade (2020) explains that international students experience academic, linguistic, and social transitions that affect communication behavior.

OECD (2019) defines international students as individuals who cross national borders for higher education purposes.

Sawir et al. (2020) state that international students face communication barriers such as limited language proficiency and unfamiliar communication norms, requiring adaptive strategies such as clarification requests and simplified language use.

2. Local Students

Local students are students who originate from the host country and are familiar with local language, academic culture, and communication norms.

Brown (2019) explains that local students function as cultural insiders whose communication patterns reflect implicit cultural expectations.

Ward et al. (2018) emphasize that local students play an important role in shaping interaction quality by influencing inclusivity and communication accessibility for international students.

C. Interaction Strategies

Interaction strategies refer to communicative actions used by speakers to

manage interaction, negotiate meaning, and prevent communication breakdown during real-time communication.

Dörnyei and Scott (2017) explain that interaction strategies function as problem-solving mechanisms that help speakers maintain communication flow when difficulties occur. These strategies are not only linguistic adjustments but also involve cognitive and social negotiation processes that allow speakers to sustain interaction.

In transcultural contexts, these strategies also reflect identity negotiation and communicative flexibility.

Types of Interaction Strategies in Transcultural Classroom Context

Interaction strategies in this study are categorized based on communication settings in transcultural classroom interaction.

1. Academic Classroom Interaction

Academic classroom interaction occurs in formal learning situations such as lectures, discussions, presentations, and question-answer sessions. In transcultural classrooms, interaction is shaped by institutional rules and linguistic diversity.

Walsh (2018) explains that classroom interaction is structured by participation frameworks, turn-taking systems, and pedagogical goals that influence how students contribute to communication.

Indicators of academic classroom interaction include:

- a. Requesting clarification of academic content or instructions
- b. Confirming understanding of lecturer explanations
- c. Rephrasing responses using simpler academic language
- d. Using nonverbal cues (e.g., nodding, gestures) to indicate understanding

2. Peer-to-Peer Interaction

Peer interaction refers to communication between students in informal academic settings such as pair work and informal discussions. It plays an important role in negotiation of meaning and language development.

Lee and Kim (2019) state that peer interaction supports both linguistic development and social meaning-making, where students collaboratively construct understanding through communication.

Indicators of peer-to-peer interaction include:

- a. Repetition of key information for clarity
- b. Paraphrasing ideas in simpler expressions
- c. Asking peers to explain unfamiliar terms
- d. Using gestures or examples to support meaning

3. Group Interaction

Group interaction involves communication among multiple students in collaborative tasks such as group discussions or projects. It requires coordination, negotiation, and shared responsibility.

Storch (2020) explains that group interaction promotes collaborative meaning-making, where students actively negotiate ideas and participation roles.

Indicators of group interaction include:

- a. Clarifying group members' ideas
- b. Rephrasing suggestions for agreement
- c. Using polite expressions in agreement/disagreement
- d. Nonverbal signals of engagement or hesitation

4. Social Academic Interaction

Social academic interaction occurs in informal campus communication outside structured learning activities. It plays a significant role in social integration and academic adjustment.

Smith and Khawaja (2018) explain that social interaction supports international students' adaptation by providing opportunities to practice language and build relationships. Indicators of social academic interaction include:

- a. Initiating conversation using simple expressions
- b. Adjusting speech rate and vocabulary

- c. Using nonverbal friendliness cues
- d. Avoiding culturally sensitive expressions

D. The Challenges of Transcultural Communication

Transcultural communication challenges refer to difficulties experienced during communication across linguistic, cultural, and interactional boundaries in multilingual academic environments. These challenges do not only emerge from language limitations, but also from differences in cultural expectations, psychological readiness, and classroom interaction structures. In transcultural contexts, communication difficulties are dynamic because meaning is continuously negotiated, yet not always easily achieved.

Recent research emphasizes that communication challenges in transcultural settings particularly within multilingual academic environments in higher education, should not be understood as fixed deficiencies, but as situational and interactional conditions that influence how individuals participate in communication (MacIntyre, 2017; Baker, 2022).

1. Linguistic Proficiency Challenge

The linguistic proficiency challenge refers to difficulties related to limited language knowledge and communicative competence that affect students' ability to

express ideas, understand messages, and maintain interaction effectively in academic settings.

Nation (2018) explains that vocabulary limitation is one of the most significant barriers in second language communication, particularly in spontaneous interaction where learners do not have sufficient time to plan their speech. When vocabulary knowledge is insufficient, learners often struggle to express meaning accurately and fluently.

Indicators of linguistic proficiency challenge include:

- a. Limited vocabulary that restricts expression of ideas and questions
- b. Grammar difficulty that affects sentence construction during spontaneous speech
- c. Low speaking fluency, often characterized by hesitation, pauses, or unfinished sentences
- d. Difficulty paraphrasing or reformulating ideas during discussion or explanation

These indicators show that linguistic limitations directly influence students' ability to participate actively in transcultural communication, especially in classroom interaction where speed and accuracy are required simultaneously.

2. Cultural Norms and Communication Style Challenge

The cultural norms and communication style challenge refers to communication difficulties that arise due to differences in cultural expectations regarding appropriate behavior, politeness, interaction patterns, and meaning interpretation in academic settings.

Gudykunst (2014) explains that communication is strongly influenced by cultural norms that shape how individuals interpret messages, respond to others, and manage interaction.

Indicators of cultural norms and communication style challenge include:

- a. Reluctance to ask questions or interrupt due to politeness norms
- b. Different interpretation of silence during classroom interaction
- c. Unfamiliarity with classroom participation norms such as turn-taking or discussion style
- d. Misinterpretation of nonverbal cues such as eye contact, gestures, or facial expressions

These indicators demonstrate that communication difficulties are not only linguistic but also deeply rooted in cultural interpretation systems that influence classroom interaction.

3. Anxiety and Confidence Challenge

The anxiety and confidence challenge refers to psychological barriers that affect students' willingness to participate in communication, particularly in second language and transcultural interaction contexts.

MacIntyre (2017) highlights that communication anxiety is a significant factor in second language interaction, where learners experience fear of making mistakes, being judged, or being misunderstood by others. This anxiety can reduce willingness to communicate and limit participation in classroom interaction.

Indicators of anxiety and confidence challenge include:

- a. Fear of making linguistic mistakes during speaking
- b. Fear of negative evaluation from lecturers or peers
- c. Low self-confidence in expressing ideas orally
- d. Avoidance of participation in classroom interaction

These indicators show that psychological factors play a crucial role in shaping communication behavior, often determining whether students choose to engage or withdraw from interaction.

4. Interactional and Classroom Context Challenge

The interactional and classroom context challenge refers to difficulties that arise from the structure of classroom interaction, participation patterns, and social dynamics within academic environments.

Walsh (2018) explains that classroom interaction is institutionally structured, meaning that participation is shaped by rules, turn-taking systems, and pedagogical control.

Indicators of interactional and classroom context challenge include:

- a. Passive participation roles adopted by international students during classroom interaction
- b. Dominance of local students in discussions or group communication
- c. Limited opportunities to initiate or respond during interaction
- d. Lack of peer support when communication breakdown occurs

These indicators show that communication challenges are not only individual but also shaped by classroom structure and social interaction patterns.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to investigate transcultural communication strategies and communication challenges experienced by international students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar.

A qualitative approach was used because the study explored participants' lived experiences, communication behavior, and meaning negotiation in natural social interaction. Ethnography was chosen to observe authentic communication practices and understand transcultural interaction within multicultural classroom settings. The researcher acted as a participant observer, as the researcher is also a local student who was naturally involved in the campus

environment and interacted with participants in both academic and social settings.

The study was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, one of the universities in Indonesia that accommodates international students from several Southeast Asian countries, particularly Thailand.

Field immersion was conducted by the researcher through continuous presence in the campus environment during the research period to observe participants' communication activities in natural academic and social settings.

| Participant Code | Country | Semester | Study Program |
|------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| HP1 | Thailand | 6th Semester | Architecture |
| SP2 | Thailand | 6th Semester | Islamic Education |
| AP3 | Thailand | 6th Semester | Management |

The participants of this study consisted of three international students from Thailand who had experienced direct interaction with local students for more than one year.

The participants were purposively selected because they actively participated in classroom discussions, presentations, group assignments, organizational activities, and daily campus interaction. To maintain confidentiality, the participants' identities were represented using participant codes. Before data collection, all participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and were informed about the research purpose, interview procedures, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. However, this study was limited by the small number of participants and the relatively short observation period, which may not fully represent the experiences of all international students in multicultural higher education contexts.

Table 1. Research Participants

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes over a period of three weeks. Each participant was observed and interviewed intensively for approximately one week to obtain deeper understanding regarding their communication practices and interaction patterns in various contexts.

The interviews were conducted offline in flexible conversational settings to encourage participants to share their experiences naturally and comfortably. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes, although the duration occasionally varied depending on the depth of participants' explanations and responses.

The interview questions in this study focused on international students' experiences communicating with local students on campus. Researchers asked about how they adjusted their language, the strategies they used when facing communication difficulties, experiences during class discussions, interactions with peers, and feelings of nervousness or lack of confidence when speaking in academic situations.

Furthermore, the interviews addressed the use of digital technology, including AI applications, which participants sometimes used to help understand word meanings, conversational context, or specific terms during interactions. The questions were

open-ended so that participants could freely share their experiences naturally without feeling constrained by specific answers.

In addition to interviews, researchers also conducted direct observations during the learning process, such as presentations, group discussions, and classroom interactions. The interaction contexts were selected purposively based on naturally occurring academic and social situations, such as classroom activities, presentations, group discussions, organizational activities, and informal interactions outside the classroom.

Observations were conducted not only in class but also outside of class, for example, when participants participated in organizational activities, chatted casually with friends, or engaged in other campus activities. Each participant was observed five times during learning activities and three times in planned situations outside of class.

Furthermore, researchers also conducted several spontaneous observations when meeting participants in their daily activities on campus. During observations, researchers observed how participants maintained communication when experiencing difficulty understanding conversations.

Some frequently used strategies included asking for clarification, mixing Indonesian with other languages, asking for help from friends, or using specific gestures to

clarify intended meaning. Researchers also recorded interaction situations, participant responses, and communication patterns throughout the study using field notes to obtain more detailed and contextual data.

The research instruments used were a semi-structured interview guide and observation sheets. These instruments were developed based on the research focus on communication strategies and communication challenges experienced by international students when interacting in a multicultural academic environment.

However, during the fieldwork process, several communication practices emerged beyond the predefined indicators, particularly the use of AI-assisted communication as an emerging transcultural communication strategy among international students.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The analysis process began with organizing and transcribing the interview and observation data. The researcher repeatedly read the data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' communication experiences and interaction patterns before initiating the coding process.

The coding process was conducted through three systematic stages, namely open coding, axial coding, and selective

coding. In the open coding stage, the researcher identified and labeled relevant data from interviews, observations, and field notes related to communication strategies, communication challenges, and adaptation practices. In the axial coding stage, the initial codes were examined and grouped into broader categories by identifying relationships among communication patterns and contextual factors. In the selective coding stage, the researcher refined and integrated the core categories into

overarching themes that represented the main findings of the study.

Finally, the findings were interpreted and connected with transcultural communication theories proposed by Baker (2015) and Dervin (2016). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and field notes to strengthen the credibility and consistency of the study findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated transcultural communication strategies and communication challenges experienced by international students during interaction with local students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. The findings were analyzed based on two research questions:

(1) transcultural communication strategies used by international students during academic interaction.

(2) communication challenges experienced during interaction with local students.

The findings were analyzed based on two research questions concerning transcultural communication strategies and communication challenges experienced by international students during interaction with local students.

However, the ethnographic findings demonstrated that communication practices in natural multicultural interaction were more dynamic and fluid than the predefined indicators proposed in the research framework. During the research process, the researchers discovered several forms of communication practices that emerged naturally in international students' daily interactions.

This use of technology typically emerged when participants were having difficulty understanding local terms or expressions they had rarely heard before.

Finding 1: Transcultural Communication Strategies Used by International Students

The research findings indicate that international students use a variety of methods to maintain communication and adapt to

a multicultural academic environment. These communication strategies emerged in many situations, including class discussions, group work, conversations with peers, and casual interactions on campus.

One of the most frequently used strategies by participants was asking for clarification when they encountered words or phrases they didn't understand. This situation occurred quite frequently because local students sometimes use certain terms with distinct Indonesian cultural meanings.

AP3 admitted that he had to directly ask local students several times when he heard terms that sounded unfamiliar to him. One example occurred when a student said:

Local student: "Don't forget to bring souvenirs when you go to Makassar."

AP3: "What are souvenirs?"

Local student: "Souvenirs are like small gifts you bring home after traveling."

A similar conversation occurred when participants heard the term "ngabuburit."

Local student: "Let's go for a walk while waiting for the time to break the fast."

From this conversation, it is clear that the communication difficulties experienced by participants were not only related to the meaning of words, but also to understanding the cultural context behind the terms. Words like "oleh-oleh" and

"ngabuburit" are actually quite familiar to local students, but they are not necessarily easy for international students to understand because these terms are closely related to the social customs of Indonesian society. This shows that clarification is used as a practical strategy to maintain communication and support mutual understanding during interaction.

This finding aligns with Baker's (2018) view, which explains that trans-cultural communication involves interactional adjustment between participants. Differences in understanding in communication are not always seen as barriers, but rather as a natural part of the process of constructing shared meaning in multicultural environments.

Furthermore, Zhu (2023) explains that communication in multilingual environments is flexible because individuals continually adapt their communication methods to suit the context they encounter. This is evident in this study, where participants relied not only on formal language skills but also used direct questions, peer assistance, and contextual understanding to maintain communication.

In this study, this strategy not only helped participants grasp the meaning of the conversation but also helped them understand the social and cultural customs that

emerge in everyday communication on campus.

The research results also showed that participants frequently used confirmation strategies during classroom interactions.

In some situations, they repeated information they considered important, confirmed their understanding, or requested further explanation in simpler Indonesian. These situations typically arose when the lecturer explained the material too quickly or when participants encountered unfamiliar vocabulary.

Observations showed that confirmation strategies helped participants feel more confident during class discussions. Before responding, they usually confirmed their understanding to reduce confusion and avoid mistakes. These findings indicate that communication in multicultural environments is a collaborative process built through mutual confirmation, clarification, and negotiation of meaning between speakers and interlocutors

.In addition to confirmation strategies, this study also found a mixture of Malay and Indonesian in participants' daily conversations. HP1 explained that at the beginning of his studies, he often mixed the two languages because he hadn't yet mastered Indonesian vocabulary.

"At first, I mixed Malay and Indonesian because I didn't know many Indonesian words yet." (HP1)

Based on observations, this language mixing occurred naturally, especially when participants were speaking with peers or engaging in casual conversations outside of class.

In some conversations, participants still used Malay pronunciation when pronouncing Indonesian words. For example, the word "pertama" was pronounced "per-tame," while "pasar terong" was pronounced "pasar terung." This situation indicates that participants utilized their existing language skills to maintain smooth communication. They did not completely separate the use of Malay and Indonesian, but rather adapted them flexibly to suit the conversational situation. Although their Indonesian language skills were still developing, participants still tried to maintain interactions that were comfortable for their interlocutors.

This finding reflects Dervin's perspective that transcultural communication involves hybrid and fluid communication practices shaped through continuous interactional negotiation.

This finding aligns with Otheguy, García, and Reid (2019), who explained that multilingual speakers typically use all of

their language skills simultaneously during communication.

In addition to language mixing, peer support was also very helpful for participants during their lectures. Based on observations, several participants appeared more comfortable when sitting with close friends who could help explain conversations or lecturer instructions they didn't understand. This support usually emerged spontaneously when participants appeared confused during discussions.

SP2 admitted that he sometimes had difficulty understanding conversations when local students mixed Indonesian with their regional languages. "Sometimes local students mix Indonesian and the local language, so it becomes difficult for me to understand." (SP2)

In such situations, participants usually ask friends to explain things again using simpler Indonesian. The presence of peers makes participants feel more comfortable asking questions without fear of being perceived as wrong. The researchers' observations showed that peer assistance was particularly helpful during group work, presentations, and class discussions, which require more active communication.

These findings demonstrate that the communication adaptation process does not occur alone. International students need a

supportive environment to more easily adjust to a new communication culture. Local students were also seen several times trying to adjust their speaking style, for example by slowing down their explanations, repeating important information, or using more easily understood vocabulary when they saw participants experiencing difficulties. This situation demonstrates that cross-cultural communication occurs through a process of mutual adjustment between both parties. Communication is shaped by both speakers and listeners who work together to ensure understanding. This view aligns with Baker (2018), who explains that cross-cultural communication is built through negotiation and cooperation during interactions.

This study also found that participants sometimes used nonverbal communication to help clarify the meaning of the conversation. Some forms of nonverbal communication that emerged included hand gestures, facial expressions, head nods, eye contact, and smiles. Although not used consistently, these strategies were quite helpful when participants had difficulty explaining something with words.

AP3 explained:

"Sometimes I use gestures when I can't explain it with words." (AP3)

Based on observations, the use of gestures was quite common during

presentations and casual conversations with local students. In some situations, participants pointed to specific objects or demonstrated movements to make it easier for the other person to understand their intentions. This approach maintained communication despite the participants' limited language skills.

Furthermore, researchers observed that participants' self-confidence gradually increased as they engaged more frequently in daily interactions with local students. AP3, for example, appeared quite active in conversations, class discussions, and campus organizational activities. He also admitted to frequently trying to memorize new vocabulary from the conversations he overheard every day.

"I often join conversations and try to memorize new Indonesian words." (AP3)

Compared to other participants, AP3 appeared more confident when speaking and more willing to initiate conversations with local students. This suggests that the more frequently participants engaged in daily communication, the more their ability and confidence in using Indonesian on campus developed.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that transcultural adaptation was not a linear process. Participants continuously adapted their communication during interaction. Adaptation therefore emerged dynamically through everyday communicative experiences rather than through formal language learning alone.

Table 2. Transcultural Communication Strategies Identified in the Study

| No | Communication Strategies | Findings |
|----|--------------------------|---|
| 1 | Clarification Requests | Participants frequently asked for explanation of unfamiliar vocabulary and cultural expressions |
| 2 | Confirmation Strategies | Participants confirmed understanding during classroom interaction |
| 3 | Language Mixing | Participants combined Malay and Indonesian during communication |
| 4 | Peer Assistance | Participants relied on peers to explain meanings and classroom instructions |
| 5 | Nonverbal Communication | Gestures and facial expressions were used to support communication |
| 6 | Repeated Interaction | Frequent interaction increased communication confidence and adaptation |

Finding 2: Communication Challenges Experienced by International Students

The findings revealed that participants experienced several communication challenges during interaction with local students.

These challenges included linguistic proficiency challenges, cultural communication style challenges, anxiety and confidence challenges, and classroom interaction challenges.

One of the most dominant challenges involved limited Indonesian vocabulary mastery. All participants explained that during the early semesters, they experienced difficulty expressing ideas, understanding lecturer explanations, and participating actively during classroom discussions.

HP1 explained:

“At first, I was afraid to speak because my Indonesian vocabulary was still limited.”

(HP1)

The findings revealed that limited vocabulary not only affected communication fluency but also influenced participants' classroom participation and communication confidence. Participants frequently required additional time to process communication meaning before responding during discussion. As a result, they occasionally remained silent during interaction even when they understood the general topic being discussed. The study also found that participants often experienced difficulties when local students spoke too quickly or mixed Indonesian with the Makassar dialect in everyday conversations. Phrases such as "dimanaki?", "makan mi!", or "sayamo pale" still felt unfamiliar to

participants because they were not yet accustomed to these local communication patterns.

SP2 said that she sometimes struggled to understand conversations when the person she was talking to spoke too quickly.

"Sometimes I can't catch the topic of conversation because they speak too fast." (SP2)

During observations, researchers observed that situations like this occurred quite frequently, especially in casual conversations outside of class. Local students typically spoke spontaneously, using a mix of Indonesian and regional dialects, so participants sometimes needed to ask their peers for clarification.

The observations confirmed that participants occasionally became silent, smiled quietly, or relied on peers when they failed to understand communication meaning. Participants sometimes immediately searched meanings through smartphones after communication difficulties occurred.

Another important challenge identified in this study was communication anxiety and low confidence during the early adaptation period. The participants explained that they were initially afraid of making language mistakes and worried about being negatively judged by local students.

“At first I preferred staying quiet because I was afraid of making mistakes.” (SP2)

This situation suggests that the communication challenges experienced by participants were not solely related to language ability but also related to the fear of making mistakes while speaking. Some participants appeared concerned that their pronunciation, word choice, or style of speaking would not be understood well by local students.

This finding aligns with research by Zhang and Zhou (2022), which explains that international students often experience communication anxiety when having to interact in a language they have not yet fully mastered. This anxiety often impacts their

willingness to participate in class discussions and social interactions on campus.

However, this study also found that communication difficulties did not always cause participants to withdraw from interactions. Over time, participants began to try various ways to remain engaged in communication, such as asking friends for help, using simpler language, or utilizing digital technology to aid in understanding conversations. This suggests that the process of communication adaptation occurs gradually through daily experiences of interacting with their surroundings.

Table 3. Communication Challenges Experienced by Participants

| No | Communication Challenges | Findings |
|----|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Limited Vocabulary | Participants experienced difficulty expressing ideas and understanding communication |
| 2 | Rapid Speech and Dialect Mixing | Participants struggled to understand local accents and regional expressions |
| 3 | Communication Anxiety | Participants feared making mistakes during communication |
| 4 | Low Communication Confidence | Participants occasionally avoided participation during discussions |
| 5 | Classroom Interaction Challenges | Participants struggled to follow rapid group discussions and turn-taking patterns |

Emerging Finding: AI-Assisted Communication as a Novel Transcultural Communication Strategy.

One of the key findings of this study is the emergence of the use of AI as a transcultural communication strategy among international students.

However, findings in the field indicate that artificial intelligence applications are actually a significant communication tool in cross-cultural interactions.

In practice, AP3 actively utilizes Gemini AI in various activities, such as class discussions, presentations, group assignments, and

daily communication with local students. One of the key emerging findings of this study is the use of Gemini AI as a transcultural communication support tool among international students. Unlike traditional translation tools such as Google Translate, which primarily provide literal word-for-word translation, Gemini AI is used by participants to interpret meaning in a more contextual and explanatory way, including cultural expressions, situational meaning, and non-verbal cues.

In practice, AP3 uses Gemini AI after encountering unfamiliar terms from lecturers or peers. When time allows, he immediately inputs the expression into the application to understand its contextual meaning. However, when communication occurs in real time and there is no opportunity to consult AI, he directly asks for clarification from interlocutors. This shows that AI is used as a complementary strategy rather than a replacement for human interaction.

The advantage of Gemini AI lies in its ability to explain meaning beyond dictionary definitions by incorporating context and situational cues. For instance, when encountering the expression “cipuruka” (a Makassar local expression meaning “I am hungry”), AP3 reported using AI by inputting a contextual prompt such as: “What does ‘cipuruka’ mean? My friend said this while

holding his stomach and making a hungry facial expression.” In this case, AI helps interpret both verbal language and non-verbal cues, which are essential in real communication.

However, AI-assisted communication is limited by time availability and dependence on digital access. In fast interactional situations, participants still rely more on direct clarification with peers rather than AI. This indicates that AI functions as a situational and supportive tool rather than a primary communication strategy.

This finding extends transcultural communication literature by showing that AI does not merely function as a translation tool but also acts as a contextual meaning interpreter that bridges linguistic and cultural understanding in real interactional settings.

The participant explained that AI applications helped him understand contextual meanings and cultural expressions more effectively than ordinary translation tools. “AI helps me understand the meaning better because it explains the context, not only the word.” (AP3)

The participant usually typed prompts such as:

1. “What the meaning Ngabuburit?”
2. “What does this sentence mean?”

The findings demonstrated that AI-assisted communication was generally used

quietly during communication situations, particularly after lecturers or local students used unfamiliar expressions.

AP3 explained that using an AI application helped him feel calmer and more confident in communicating, as the application was able to provide more detailed explanations regarding contextual meaning and language usage in certain situations.

This finding demonstrates that current transcultural communication practices are increasingly influenced by developments in digital technology. AI no longer functions solely as a translation tool, but also as a communication aid that helps users understand cultural meanings, situations, and communication intentions more deeply. AI acts as a mediator that supports the process of understanding in cross-cultural interactions, not simply as a tool for translating words.

Thus, the use of AI not only plays a role in everyday communication but also supports academic participation and increases confidence in communicating in the classroom.

In contrast to traditional interaction models that emphasize human-to-human communication, this study highlights that AI reshapes interaction patterns by reducing

communication barriers, accelerating meaning interpretation, and increasing students' confidence in participating in academic discourse.

This aligns with recent digital communication studies that emphasize that artificial intelligence technology has transformed the way individuals understand messages, adapt, and interact in multicultural environments. Importantly, this research provides a novel contribution, as most previous studies on international students' communication adaptation have focused on language barriers, peer support, code-switching, and cultural adjustment. Few studies have specifically addressed the role of AI in supporting transcultural communication in Indonesian higher education settings. Therefore, this research provides new insights into the role of artificial intelligence in modern cross-cultural communication.

This indicates a shift from traditional interaction-based adaptation toward a hybrid communication system where human interaction and AI tools jointly influence how meaning is understood and negotiated in multicultural academic settings.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that transcultural communication among international students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar is a dynamic and continuous process involving adaptation, negotiation of meaning, and understanding of cultural differences in everyday academic interaction.

To maintain communication, participants employed various strategies, including clarification requests, language mixing, peer assistance, confirmation strategies, and non-verbal communication. Despite these efforts, participants still experienced challenges related to limited vocabulary, communication anxiety, differences in communication styles, and difficulties participating in classroom discussions. However, frequent interaction and peer support gradually increased their confidence and communication adaptation.

An important contribution of this study is the identification of AI-assisted communication as an emerging transcultural communication mediator. Gemini AI was used not

only for translation but also to interpret contextual meanings, cultural expressions, and conversational intent in Indonesian academic settings.

Overall, this study highlights that transcultural communication is constructed through continuous processes of adaptation, collaboration, and negotiation among students in multicultural academic environments.

The study also contributes to transcultural communication research by emphasizing the emerging role of AI in supporting communication adaptation within Indonesian higher education contexts.

Practically, the findings suggest that universities and lecturers should integrate digital literacy and AI-assisted communication awareness into international student support programs. Future research is recommended to explore AI-assisted transcultural communication with larger participant groups and in different cultural contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher would like to express her sincere gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings, guidance, and strength throughout the completion of this research.

Special appreciation is extended to the research supervisors, Mam Nurdevi Bte Abdul and Mam Herlina Daddi, for their valuable guidance, constructive feedback,

patience, and continuous support throughout the research and writing process.

The researcher is also grateful to the international students who participated in this research for their valuable participation and contribution during to this study. Their openness and cooperation were essential to the completion of this study. Sincere appreciation is addressed to the lecturers and academic staff of the English Education

Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, as well as lecturers from the Management, Islamic Education, and Architecture Departments, for their academic support and assistance during the observation and research process.

The researcher also expresses gratitude to friends, colleagues, and all individuals who contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of this research

REFERENCES

- Andrade, M. S. (2021). International students in higher education: Expectations and adjustment challenges. *Journal of International Students*, 11(2), 345–360.
- Baker, W. (2018). *English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication*. Cambridge University Press.
- Baker, W. (2021). Intercultural and transcultural awareness in language education. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 12(4), 589–612.
- Baker, W. (2022). Transcultural communication in global contexts: Theory and practice. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 22(3), 245–260.
- Brown, L. (2019). Host students as cultural mediators in international education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(5), 1023–1037.
- Dervin, F. (2020). *Interculturality in education: A theoretical and methodological toolbox*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dervin, F., & Simpson, A. (2022). Transculturality and language education: Beyond fixed identities. *Language Teaching*, 55(2), 145–160.
- Kasneci, E., et al. (2023). ChatGPT for good? On opportunities and challenges of large language models for education. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 103, 102274.
- Lee, J., & Kim, H. (2019). Peer interaction and language development in academic contexts. *System*, 81, 1–12.
- MacIntyre, P. D. (2017). Willingness to communicate in the second language: Understanding anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(1), 10–25.

- Nation, I. S. P. (2018). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- OECD. (2019). *Education at a glance 2019: OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing.
- Otheguy, R., García, O., & Reid, W. (2019). A translanguaging view of language. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 10(4), 625–650.
- Sato, M., & Ballinger, S. (2016). *Peer interaction and second language learning*. Routledge.
- Sawir, E., et al. (2020). Loneliness and international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 24(1), 20–36.
- Sert, O., & Walsh, S. (2022). Classroom interaction and teacher talk. *Language Teaching Research*, 26(3), 345–362.
- Storch, N. (2020). Collaborative writing and group interaction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 49, 100711.
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2018). *The psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Walsh, S. (2018). *Investigating classroom discourse* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Zawacki-Richter, O., et al. (2019). Systematic review of AI in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(39).
- Zhang, X., & Zhou, M. (2022). Communication anxiety among international students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(8), 1602–1615.
- Zhu, H. (2021). Translanguaging and transcultural communication in education. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 34(2), 123–138.
- Zhu, H. (2023). Multilingual communication in higher education contexts. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 44(5), 412–428.