



ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY OF MUSLIM AND NON-MUSLIM STUDENT INTERACTION IN ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AT MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF NORTH SUMATRA

Mardiana Siagian¹, Muhammad Husni Ritonga²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: dian220009@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received :

Revised :

Accepted :

Available online

<http://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/analytica>

E-ISSN: 2541-5263

P-ISSN: 1411-4380



This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze intercultural communication between Muslim and non-Muslim students within the multicultural environment of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU). In both academic and social interactions, cultural and religious diversity can be both a potential and a challenge in establishing effective communication. This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The findings reveal that the effectiveness of intercultural communication is influenced by several factors, including individual cultural competence, empathy and openness, stereotypes and prejudices, religious symbols, and the campus social environment. The forms of communication observed include formal and informal verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and symbolic cultural and religious expressions. The study concludes that successful intercultural communication requires institutional support, inclusive interaction spaces, and mutual respect among students. These findings are expected to serve as input for higher education institutions in strengthening multicultural and tolerant practices on campus.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Multiculturalism, Social Interaction, Tolerance, Cultural Competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has transformed the face of social interaction in various sectors, including higher education. Universities have now become multicultural spaces, where students from diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds meet and interact. The Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra (UMSU), as an open Islamic campus, presents a similar reality. There, Muslim students, as the majority, interact with non-Muslim students in academic and social contexts. This diversity

presents the potential for enriching learning experiences, but also poses challenges to intercultural communication if not managed wisely (Samovar et al., 2021).

Field studies show that students from different religious backgrounds often face complex dynamics, ranging from misunderstandings in the use of religious symbols, differences in communication styles, to the formation of exclusive groups. This situation can disrupt social cohesion and reduce the effectiveness of collaborative learning. On the other hand, several activities such as interfaith group discussions, organizational activities, and informal interactions demonstrate efforts at adaptation and inclusivity (Banks, 2006; Gudykunst & Kim, 2021). These findings suggest that intercultural communication can bridge or divide students, depending on each individual's cultural competence.

Previous research, such as that by Sanusi, Maimun, & Sirait (2022) at Syiah Kuala University and Hamdani (2023) at UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim, showed that interfaith communication on Islamic campuses is ongoing but still overshadowed by stereotypes and prejudice. These studies generally highlight social interactions, but have not yet deeply examined the forms and factors of communication in two important domains: academic and social. Similarly, studies by Fitri & Yuliana (2021) and Kurniawati (2021) still focus on the organizational context of campuses, rather than the combination of classrooms and students' daily lives.

A research gap is evident in the context of private Islamic campuses like UMSU, which have a strong Islamic identity but are also open to students from non-Muslim backgrounds. To date, there has been little local research that holistically examines the forms of intercultural communication between Muslim and non-Muslim students in two main contexts—academic and social—comprehensively taking into account individual, symbolic, and institutional factors. This is crucial for universities to design policies that are not only based on Islamic values but also address the need for healthy intercultural interactions (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019).

This research is urgent given the strategic role of universities in shaping the tolerant character of the younger generation. Through this study, the authors aim to analyze the forms of intercultural communication that occur between Muslim and non-Muslim students at UMSU, as well as the factors that influence its effectiveness. The research findings are expected to contribute significantly to the development of inclusive communication strategies and the strengthening of multiculturalism practices in campus environments based on Islamic values, a blessing for all (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) (Deardorff, 2020; Neuliep, 2021).

Intercultural Communication Theory

Intercultural communication is the process of exchanging messages between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. According to Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019), intercultural communication encompasses understanding cultural norms, values, and symbols that differ in cross-cultural

interactions. In the context of a university like UMSU, which has religious and cultural diversity, intercultural communication is crucial in creating harmonious interactions among students.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner developed social identity theory, which explains that individuals tend to categorize themselves into specific social groups and identify themselves based on that membership. Research by Verkuyten and Yogeewaran (2020) suggests that social identity plays a significant role in interactions between religious groups on campus. Muslim and non-Muslim students at UMSU may bring their respective religious identities into interactions, which then influences how they communicate and respond to differences.

Cultural Adaptation Theory

Kim (2017) explains cultural adaptation theory as a dynamic process by which individuals adjust to a new cultural environment. For non-Muslim students in a Muslim-majority environment like UMSU, the adaptation process is crucial for effective communication and healthy interactions. Conversely, Muslim students also need to understand the customs and values brought by non-Muslim students to foster mutual understanding.

Intercultural Competence Theory

According to Deardorff (2020), intercultural intelligence encompasses a person's ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In a multicultural campus environment, students with high levels of intercultural intelligence tend to be able to build better relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. This includes openness, empathy, and active listening skills.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it aims to deeply understand the meaning, experiences, and dynamics of intercultural communication that occurs between Muslim and non-Muslim students in the context of academic and social life within the multicultural environment of the UMSU campus.

This research employs a case study method. This method allows researchers to explore in detail and comprehensively the real-world situation, namely how students from different cultural and religious backgrounds interact and build communication in everyday life on campus.

This research was conducted at the Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra (UMSU), located on Jalan Kapten Mukhtar Basri, Medan City, North

Sumatra. This location was chosen based on the diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds of students studying at UMSU, making it a representative location for studying intercultural interactions, particularly between Muslim and non-Muslim students. The research is scheduled to take place from March to April 2025, and will include observation, interviews, documentation, and data analysis.

The subjects of this study were students from the University of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra (UMSU) from diverse religious backgrounds, including Muslim and non-Muslim students actively involved in academic and social activities on campus.

The object of this study was the intercultural communication process that occurs in interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim students, specifically in the context of academic activities (such as class discussions, group work, seminars) and social activities (such as student organizations, religious activities, and community activities).

Data collection used in-depth interviews with several key informants, including Muslim and non-Muslim students active in academic and social activities, as well as lecturers or campus administrators familiar with intercultural interactions at UMSU. Participatory observation: The researcher directly observed interactions occurring in various campus activities, such as student organizations, group discussions, social activities, and others. Documentation: The researcher collected supporting documents such as activity photos, organizational brochures, or activity archives that demonstrate the involvement of students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, grouping, and interpreting themes that emerged from interviews and observations. The steps include: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Intercultural Communication

Interviews and observations revealed several factors influencing the effectiveness of intercultural communication among students, one of which is Individual Cultural Competence. Students with prior understanding and experience in cross-cultural interactions are more capable of communicating effectively. They tend to be more tolerant and flexible in adapting their communication methods (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

Furthermore, Stereotypes and Prejudices: Students who demonstrate empathy and openness can foster better communication. They tend to be more appreciative of differences and less judgmental (Samovar et al., 2012). Empathy and Openness: Students who demonstrate empathy and openness can foster better communication. They tend to be more appreciative of differences and less

judgmental (Martin and Nakayama, 2010). Differences in the use of religious terminology are also factors influencing the effectiveness of intercultural communication (Hofstede, 1997). The existence of a campus social environment that provides collaborative spaces such as student organizations and social activities has been shown to increase the frequency and quality of intercultural interactions (Banks 2006).

Forms of Intercultural Communication

Interviews and observations reveal that interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim students take place in various forms of communication, both verbal and non-verbal, formal and informal. Formal verbal communication, for example, tends to use formal and neutral language, avoiding religiously sensitive terms. Examples include class discussions, seminars, and group projects between students from diverse backgrounds. Informal verbal communication, on the other hand, tends to be more flexible, with a mix of regional languages, Indonesian, and English being used. Examples include casual conversations in the cafeteria, organizational meetings, and non-academic activities.

Meanwhile, non-verbal communication involves several non-Muslim students who admit to learning to read Muslim students' gestures or expressions to avoid misunderstandings. For example, facial expressions, eye contact, and body language are used to convey respect. Symbolic communication and cultural identity include religious attributes such as the hijab, the cross, or the prayer before meals, which serve as symbols of identity communication. Although not all students understand these symbols, mutual respect is quite prevalent.

Findings indicate that the effectiveness of intercultural communication at UMSU is strongly influenced by internal factors (attitude, empathy, experience) and external factors (institutional support, interaction space). The presence of students from diverse backgrounds is not a barrier, but rather an opportunity to strengthen the values of tolerance and openness. Intercultural communication is effective when students are able to manage differences wisely and the campus provides a space for equal interaction.

In the context of UMSU as an Islamic campus, the accommodating attitude of Muslim students towards non-Muslim students demonstrates the application of the Islamic value of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* in social communication practices. Conversely, non-Muslim students demonstrate an interest in understanding the dominant culture, which strengthens social cohesion.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion regarding the interaction of Muslim and non-Muslim students at the Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra (UMSU), the following conclusions can be drawn. Namely, the

effectiveness of intercultural communication between Muslim and non-Muslim students in the multicultural environment of UMSU is influenced by Individual cultural competence, namely the extent to which students are able to understand and adapt, Empat and Openness which help students build communication based on respect for differences, Stereotypes and initial prejudices, which can be obstacles if not managed reflectively, Religious language and symbols, which if not understood properly can lead to misunderstandings, And the campus environment, including the role of lecturers and student organizations in creating an inclusive communication space. And the forms of communication that occur between Muslim and non-Muslim students include, formal verbal, informal verbal, non-verbal and symbolic and cultural forms of communication

References

- Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., McDaniel, E. R., & Roy, C. S. (2021). *Communication Between Cultures* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Neuliep, J. W. (2021). *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (8th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & Dorjee, T. (2019). *Communicating Across Cultures* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Rahman, A. (2022). Komunikasi antarbudaya di lingkungan kampus multikultural: Studi pada mahasiswa lintas agama. *Jurnal Komunikasi Interkultural*, 7(1), 45-58.
- Siregar, N., & Lubis, R. (2023). Dinamika interaksi sosial mahasiswa lintas agama di perguruan tinggi Islam. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya*, 9(2), 112-124.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & Dorjee, T. (2019). *Communicating Across Cultures*. Guilford Press.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2017). *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-cultural Adaptation*. SAGE Publications.
- Verkuyten, M., & Yogeewaran, K. (2020). Intergroup Tolerance and Ethnic Diversity in Education. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32(2), 389-409.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2020). *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles*. UNESCO Publishing.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2021). *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication*. Routledge.
- Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., McDaniel, E. R., & Roy, C. S. (2021). *Communication Between Cultures* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Neuliep, J. W. (2021). *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (8th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & Dorjee, T. (2019). *Communicating Across Cultures* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Rahman, A. (2022). Komunikasi antarbudaya di lingkungan kampus multikultural: Studi pada mahasiswa lintas agama. *Jurnal Komunikasi Interkultural*, 7(1), 45-

58.

- Siregar, N., & Lubis, R. (2023). Dinamika interaksi sosial mahasiswa lintas agama di perguruan tinggi Islam. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya*, 9(2), 112-124.
- Hamdani, M. R. (2023). Interaksi Sosial Mahasiswa Muslim dan Non-Muslim di Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. Skripsi, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau.
- Sanusi, S., Maimun, M., & Sirait, G. M. (2022). Interaksi Sosial Antara Mahasiswa Muslim Dengan Mahasiswa Non-Muslim di Lingkungan Universitas Syiah Kuala. *Community: Pengawas Dinamika Sosial*, 4(2), 123-135.
- Fitri, V. N., & Yuliana, N. (2021). Peran Komunikasi Antarbudaya pada Mahasiswa dengan Empat Etnis Berbeda di Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 13(1), 45-60.
- Nadila, T. (2024). Pola Interaksi Sosial Mahasiswa yang Berbeda Suku di Universitas Malikussaleh. Skripsi, Universitas Malikussaleh.
- Sumarwan, E. (2023). Komunikasi Antarbudaya Mahasiswa dalam Mewujudkan Keharmonisan di Lingkungan Kampus. *Social: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan IPS*, 3(4), 158-170.
- Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., McDaniel, E. R., & Roy, C. S. (2021). *Communication Between Cultures* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Neuliep, J. W. (2021). *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (8th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & Dorjee, T. (2019). *Communicating Across Cultures* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Rahman, A. (2022). Komunikasi antarbudaya di lingkungan kampus multikultural: Studi pada mahasiswa lintas agama. *Jurnal Komunikasi Interkultural*, 7(1), 45-58.
- Siregar, N., & Lubis, R. (2023). Dinamika interaksi sosial mahasiswa lintas agama di perguruan tinggi Islam. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya*, 9(2), 112-124.