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Overcoming intercultural communication challenges in serving international students: University staff perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the intercultural communication challenges faced by university staff in supporting international students, with a focus on non-traditional study-abroad destinations such as Indonesia. While existing literature emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching and support systems to meet international students' needs, the staff perspective remains underexplored. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research involved homogeneous, moderated focus group discussions (FGDs) with thirteen academic and non-academic staff at an international university in Jakarta. The findings reveal key communication barriers, including language difficulties, regulatory compliance issues, cultural comparisons (noted only by non-academic staff), social integration challenges, differing time orientations, contextual misunderstandings, and varied interpretations of informal communication (identified only by academic staff). Staff responded to these challenges using various conflict management styles such as Obliging, Compromising, Integrating, Dominating, and seeking third-party help. The study concludes that intercultural communication issues are complex and role-dependent, underscoring the need for differentiated support strategies. A practical academic communication model is proposed to guide universities particularly in Indonesia and similar contexts in improving staff training and enhancing the international student experience.

Keywords: Academic communication model, Conflict management styles, Intercultural communication, International students university staff.

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1. Introduction

International students play a significant role in contemporary higher education due to various economic, cultural, and academic reasons [1]. In 2020, there were around 10,000 international students in Indonesia on a student visa [2]. Additionally, Hapsari and Hamamah [3] discuss the increasing number of international students in the higher education sector in Indonesia, emphasizing the importance of institutions paying attention to students' adjustment processes in both academic and non-academic areas [3]. Educational marketing literature emphasizes the importance of institutions being responsible for meeting the needs of admitted students by adapting their teaching methods and support systems. This approach regards students as 'customers' and staff members as 'service providers' [4].

Research highlights that international students often face these challenges when communicating with university staff. Additionally, staff members sometimes hold ethnocentric views, which can lead to misunderstandings and hinder communication [5]. These issues underscore the need for increased cultural competence and awareness among university staff to better support international students [6].

Extensive research has been conducted to explore the challenges that international students may encounter while transitioning to university [7, 8]. These challenges can be categorized into academic and socio-cultural aspects, as they often require adaptation to a new teaching and learning environment, as well as to a new culture and language [9]. Although much attention has been given to the experiences of students and the contributions of staff in shaping these experiences, there is a noticeable absence of substantial research on the difficulties faced by staff members who work with these students and their ability to provide support.

Moreover, current research in this field has also predominantly focused on traditional or the most popular study-abroad destination countries, where the majority of international students are concentrated [9, 10]. In addition, previous studies involving staff members typically focused on a single faculty or specific services such as counseling or student services [11].

Therefore, this study examines the intercultural communication challenges encountered by both academic and non-academic staff at an international university in Jakarta, Indonesia. The study aims to answer: (1) What intercultural communication challenges do university staff face when working with international students? (2) How do they overcome these challenges?

Academic staff refers to individuals involved in teaching or research, while non-academic staff includes those in administrative, support, and service roles who are not directly involved in teaching [12]. The proposed academic communication model, a solution framework to address these challenges, can serve as a reference for other universities in Indonesia and beyond that that enroll international students, and it can also form the basis for future studies at other institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Discussion of Related Studies

Considering similar research is vital to ensure our study's novelty and significance, helping to prevent duplication and ensure a valuable contribution. One relevant study is "Shape-Shifting and Pushing Against the Odds" by Miller [12] in The Australian Educational Researcher, which explored staff perceptions of first-generation students in the UK and South Africa. It was found that while staff recognized these students' challenges, they often overlooked the strengths they bring to higher education. This highlights the need to challenge assumptions about diversity and inclusive practices. Our research differs by focusing on international students broadly and being conducted at a single international university.

Another study, "Pulled in Many Directions" by Hofstede et al. [13] in the Teaching in Higher Education journal, examined the experiences of academic staff in New Zealand responding to international students, highlighting tensions and complexities in engagement. It shares similarities with our research in its focus on challenges faced by university staff and the qualitative approach, but differs in location and scope, as it involved three colleges and only academic staff.

Lastly, "Mind the Gap" by Abbuhl and Mackey [14] in Higher Education Review, staff and postgraduate perceptions of student experiences were investigated, revealing struggles with integration and support among international students. While qualitative methods were used to explore staff perceptions, our study emphasizes the challenges faced by staff themselves.

2.2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimension

Hofstede et al. [13] Cultural Dimension, as discussed in the book "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind" Hofstede et al. [13] is a framework that identifies and measures cultural differences across nations. The theory is based on six cultural dimensions:

(1) Power Distance: This dimension reflects the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect power to be distributed unequally. (2) Individualism vs. Collectivism: It measures the degree to which individuals in a society are integrated into groups and prioritize group interests over individual interests. (3) Masculinity vs. Femininity: This dimension explores the distribution of emotional roles between genders and the importance of assertiveness and competitiveness in society. (4) Uncertainty Avoidance: It assesses the extent to which a society tolerates ambiguity and uncertainty, and the level of anxiety individuals feel in uncertain situations. (5) Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Normative Orientation: This dimension focuses on the values of perseverance and thriftiness versus respect for tradition and fulfilling social obligations. (6) Indulgence vs. Restraint: It examines the extent to which a society allows gratification of basic human desires related to enjoying life and having fun.

These dimensions offer a glimpse into the various ways in which societies vary in terms of their values, beliefs, and behaviors. Having an understanding of these dimensions can greatly enhance interactions in everyday cross-cultural

encounters [13]. By recognizing cultural differences, individuals can modify their communication methods, decision-making approaches, and behaviors to successfully connect with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

2.3. High/Low Context Culture

Understanding communication across different cultures involves considering the concept of context, which is crucial. According to Hall, context serves as a significant factor in determining how individuals communicate, positioning them along a spectrum ranging from high to low context [15]. Those from high-context cultures typically place importance on physical surroundings, nonverbal cues, and the broader context when conveying meaning. Building trust and nurturing relationships are key priorities in such cultures. Conversely, individuals from low-context cultures rely more on direct verbal messages for communication, prioritizing task completion over relationship-building. Generally, those from individualistic cultures tend to favor low-context communication styles, while those from collectivistic cultures lean towards high-context communication.

The dimensions mentioned earlier are not rigid rules; rather, they indicate common tendencies among individuals within each cultural group [15]. Within any culture, there can be subcultures that exhibit varying orientations. For instance, in the United States, different ethnic communities may hold distinct sets of values. For example, first-generation Asian immigrants in the US may uphold collectivistic values, while later generations and other ethnic groups might adopt more individualistic traits. Moreover, individual differences can exist within the same culture or subculture. Additionally, depending on the circumstances or social setting, an individual might deviate from their cultural norms.

2.4. Face Negotiation Theory

The Face Negotiation Theory, developed by Ting-Toomey [16] examines how cultural and situational factors influence conflict management in communication. It emphasizes "face," or how individuals wish to be perceived and how they treat others based on social expectations [17]. The theory provides a framework for understanding how cultural norms, individual differences, and contexts shape conflict strategies and communication behaviors.

Cultural Membership and Face Concerns are key elements of this theory. Self-face concern focuses on preserving one's self-image in conflict, while other-face concern involves accommodating the other person's identity. Mutual-face concern considers the images of both parties and the relationship. Cultural norms, personal traits, and circumstances shape how individuals protect their self-face or mutual-face. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey tested the theory that face influences responses in conflict [18]. Their study included participants from China, Germany, Japan, and the United States, who reflected on recent interpersonal conflicts.

Results showed that cultural individualism-collectivism directly affected conflict styles, mediated by self-construal and face concerns. Self-face concern was linked to dominating styles, while other-face concern correlated with avoiding and integrating styles. Cultural groups employed different facework strategies: Germans favored direct confrontation, Japanese used pretending and accommodating, Chinese opted for avoiding and accommodating, and U.S. Americans expressed themselves directly while remaining calm. Understanding the intersection of cultural membership and face concerns provides insights into conflict resolution and identity management in diverse contexts.

2.5. Culture & Style of Conflict Management

Researchers from various disciplines have long been intrigued by the strategies people employ to handle conflict, spanning more than two decades. However, the focus on intercultural approaches to conflict management has only emerged relatively recently. Just as culture significantly influences various aspects of life, it also plays a pivotal role in shaping how conflicts arise and evolve. Consequently, scholarly interest in this area has understandably surged in recent times.

Conflict style refers to the typical patterns of responses individuals exhibit in various confrontational interactions. Putnam, Poole, and Ting-Toomey have explored this concept [19, 20]. The categories of conflict management styles, originally delineated by Rahim [21], Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II), which includes dominating, integrating, compromising, obliging, and avoiding, have served as a foundation [21]. Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, and Yee-Jung expanded this model to eight styles to accommodate ethnic variations in conflict resolution [22]. In their updated model, the original five styles are retained, supplemented by emotional expression, third-party assistance, and passive aggression.

Integrating (high self, high other) reflects a strong consideration for both personal and others' objectives, aiming for mutually beneficial solutions through effective communication and transparency [21, 22]. Obliging (low self, high other) prioritizes others' goals, minimizing conflict by accommodating their desires. In contrast, dominating (high self, low other) focuses on personal goals, using authority to achieve objectives often at the expense of others, resulting in a win-lose situation. Avoiding (low self, low other) shows little concern for either party, leading to passive withdrawal from conflict and suppressed grievances. Compromising (moderate self, moderate other) strikes a balance, with each party willing to make concessions for mutual benefit. Emotional expression (high self, moderate other) utilizes feelings to influence conflict communication, while third-party help (moderate self, moderate other) involves enlisting an external mediator. Lastly, passive aggression (high self, moderate other) sidesteps direct confrontation while provoking indirect responses.

Utilizing Rahim's five conflict management styles [21]. Ting-Toomey proposed that individuals from individualistic or low-context cultures tend to engage in direct and explicit verbal communication, leading to a preference for conflict management styles such as dominating, integrating, and compromising [22]. Conversely, individuals from collectivistic or high-context cultures, who prioritize preserving face and maintaining relationships, tend to adopt indirect modes of interaction and prefer conflict management styles such as obliging and avoiding.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Thinking Framework

The research utilizes Face Negotiation Theory, High/Low Context Culture, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, and Conflict Communication Style theory as its theoretical foundations, as these theories explain the fundamental dynamics of intercultural interactions, how they influence communication styles, and approaches to handling conflict. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework. Once the researcher identifies the challenges and strategies to address these challenges, a solution framework model will be developed to overcome the challenges of serving international students at an international university in Jakarta. This solution model framework can serve as a reference for other universities in Indonesia that enroll international students and can form the basis for future studies in other institutions.

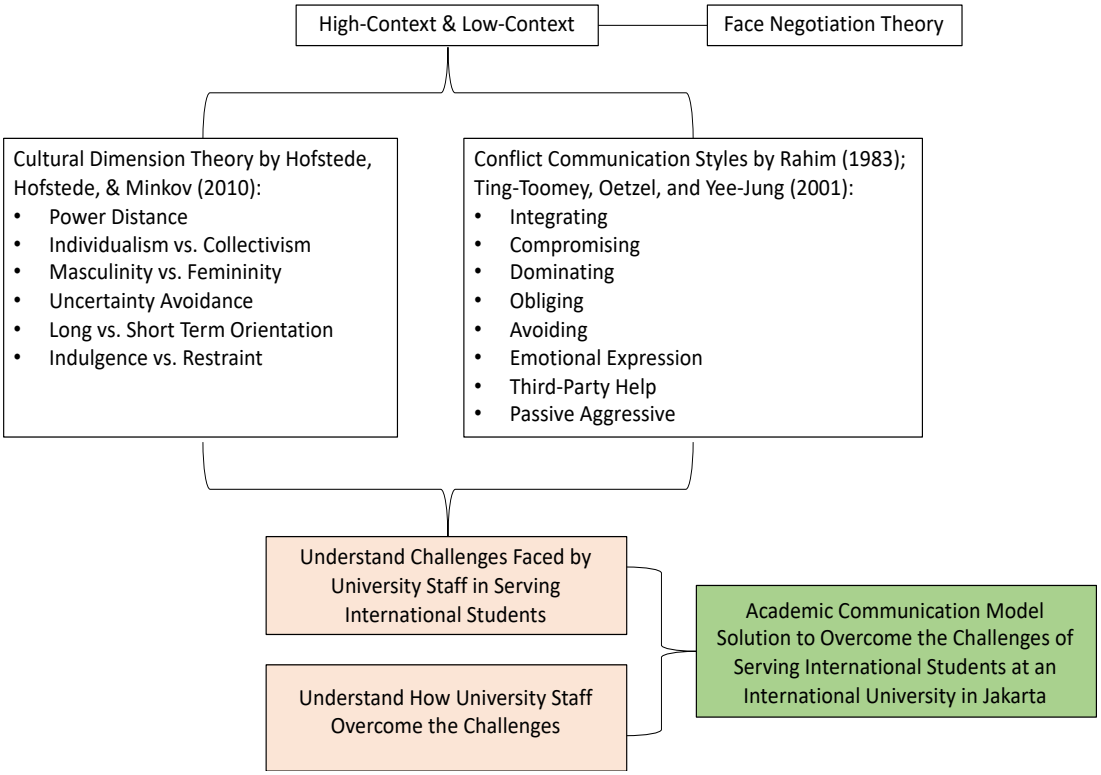

Figure 1.
Thinking Framework.
Source: Hofstede et al. [13], Rahim [21] and Ting-Toomey et al. [22]

3.2. Data Collection

This paper is based on a qualitative study that offers deep insights into participants' lives and experiences [23]. A case study approach was employed to explore the research from a personal perspective [14]. A multi-purpose sample was selected, including both academic (lecturers) and non-academic staff (administrative, support, and service roles) from an international university in Jakarta. This method captures diversity, ensuring participants have direct contact with international students and represent various departments and levels of experience [24].

Thirteen respondents participated in focus group discussions (FGDs), divided into two sessions: six academic staff in the first and seven non-academic staff in the second. The list of respondents is shown on Table 1. FGDs aimed to explore participants' perspectives and experiences in a collaborative setting [25]. Homogeneous groups, where participants share similar characteristics, foster comfort and camaraderie, allowing for more open expression of views [25].

This study employed content analysis [26]. The transcripts were carefully organized and reviewed to ensure completeness and to extract key ideas. Important information regarding challenges and how the university staff addressed them was highlighted. Initial codes were then created by noting and marking key terms on the transcript pages, such as when staff discussed difficulties and their strategies for overcoming them. Similar categories were identified, and patterns were compared. The categories were grouped into blocks of themes, and related blocks were merged into the major themes identified in the study.

Table 1.
Participants of the Study

No.	Participants (Initials)	Position
1	JJLM	Head of Program - Computer Science
2	LEF	Subject Content Coordinator – Communication
3	DP	Subject Content Coordinator -Graphic Design
4	PL	Character Building Subject Lecturer
5	ES	Subject Content Coordinator - Graphic Design
6	AA	Head of Program - Business Management & Marketing
7	ATS	Deputy Head of Program -International Business
8	SRD	Inbound Section Head
9	MU	Inbound Staff
10	ME	Mobility Operations Officer
11	RSAM	Inbound Staff
12	YM	Student Services Staff
13	FI	Student Services Staff

By integrating secondary data, such as literature studies, theoretical frameworks, or existing research reports, researchers can enrich the analysis and provide a more robust interpretation of the phenomena under investigation and as method triangulation [24]. Besides, it allows researchers to compare and contrast findings from different sources, enhancing the credibility and comprehensiveness of the study. This approach contributes to the depth and validity of the research findings by drawing on a variety of sources to support and contextualize the primary data obtained from the FGDs. The FGD questions, full transcript, and a sample of the coding process are available at: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15609924

4. Results of Research

The study aims to answer: (1) What intercultural communication challenges do university staff face when working with international students? (2) How do they overcome these challenges? The challenges faced by university staff members primarily manifest in themes such as language barriers, compliance with regulations, cultural comparison (noted only by non-academic staff), social integration, time orientation, differing contextual understanding, and varying interpretations of informal communication (identified only by academic staff). Furthermore, staff employ various conflict management styles, including integrating, dominating, obliging, compromising, and seeking third-party help. Excerpts from interviews and participants' perceptions are incorporated into the discussion of these themes, which were derived from the data.

4.1. Theme 1: Language Barrier

In the current study, four academic staff and two non-academic staff reported that language barriers, such as fluency and accent, present significant intercultural communication challenges when working with international students. Due to these perceived language barriers, university staff noted that they impact students' ability to grasp instructions, necessitate the use of additional tools for understanding, and hinder students from fully expressing themselves. For instance, RSAM, a non-academic staff member, explained:

> *"For me personally, it's the language. It's quite hard to understand what is being said, especially by the French or Chinese students. It's kind of hard for me to understand, which mostly leads to misunderstandings."* (Interview with RSAM – non-academic staff, 26 June 2024).

Moreover, the staff are doing their best to understand the students and explain slowly, even going the extra mile by providing individual explanations or inviting international students to come to their desks, as shared by AA, an academic staff:

> *"Yeah, I will try to speak as plainly as possible sometimes. When it comes to assessment or expectations from the course, I tend to try to explain to them one by one, like I call them to my desk, for example, during the break, or I confirm personally to them that. Do you have any questions? Just make sure that we are on the same page."* (Interview with AA – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

4.2. Theme 2: Compliance with Regulations

Five non-academic staff and one academic staff member reported that compliance with regulations, such as class attendance, clothing guidelines, and immigration policy matters, is a significant challenge. Due to the administrative nature of their work, this issue is particularly critical for non-academic staff. For example, international students from Europe may be more relaxed regarding regulations such as class attendance. In addition, they might more readily conform to dress codes and other regulations set by both the university and external authorities, including interacting directly with higher authorities. For instance, ME, a non-academic staff member, reported:

> *"I was about to mention the same thing, besides about clothing. Yeah, especially because it's not only about (UNIVERSITY NAME) regulation, since we are dealing with the other authorities like immigration, right? They are*

very strict about the outfit regulation. We still remind the student to 'okay, for the next time, please wear a more proper outfit. Do not wear this kind of outfit again." (Interview with ME – non-academic staff, 26 June 2024).

Moreover, for academic staff, their challenge is mainly related to class attendance, as mentioned by ES, an academic staff member:

"Some students, yes, I think they keep ignoring or relaxing with our regulations because sometimes they don't care about the policies and regulations. For example, we have a maximum absence attendance policy in the class, but they seem to to take it easy about it." (Interview with ES – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

Regarding how to overcome the challenge, non-academic staff applied various solutions, such as empathizing with students while ensuring that both parties are satisfied, allowing special requests from international students with the understanding that they will not be repeated in the future, and seeking third-party help. YM, a non-academic staff member, reported a similar approach as follows:

"I think I also need to thank the iBuddy students, our local students who support international students, because their contribution to explaining about (UNIVERSITY NAME) regulation is also helpful, so fewer students go to Student Services." (Interview with YM – non-academic staff, 26 June 2024).

On the other hand, the academic staff is firm in using their authority and also seeks third-party assistance from non-academic staff:

"And because they want and need to pass, I tell them what they should follow; that's all. Sometimes we ask the staff, especially non-academic staff, to let them know and remind them about the regulations and policies. And so we don't need to mention that over and over in the class." (Interview with ES – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

4.3. Theme 3: Cultural Comparison

The presence of multiple international students introduces an additional intercultural communication challenge related to cultural comparison for non-academic staff. The staff reported that these students often compare rules and perceive the regulations in their home countries as superior. For instance, SRD, a non-academic staff member, voiced:

"One of the Finnish students complained about the strictness of the regulations and other issues, and told me, 'Even in Finland, the country with the best education system in the world, we're not doing this, and we are still alive. My teacher doesn't care if I skip classes as long as I can perform". (Interview with SRD – non-academic staff, 26 June 2024).

To overcome this challenge, the non-academic staff tried to put themselves in the students' perspective and then kept reminding them about the university regulations, as mentioned by SRD, a non-academic staff member:

"I understand why they said that, so I put myself in their shoes. Nevertheless, I still keep reminding them of the university regulations they have to follow" (Interview with SRD – non-academic staff, 26 June 2024).

4.4. Theme 4: Social Integration

The presence of multiple international students from the same country presents additional challenges, especially for academic staff, concerning social integration. Staff reported that these students, particularly when several are from the same country, tend to cluster together and converse in their native language during class. For example, JJLM, an academic staff member, expressed:

"I had an experience like, yeah, I got like 3 French students in my class. They are all always wanting to be seated together, and they speak in French and always huddle up together" (Interview with JJLM – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

To address this challenge, the staff member encourages international students to consistently speak English in class, benefiting both the lecturer and the students. Additionally, they reported using their authority as a lecturer to establish consistent rules for all students, preventing any special treatment, as mentioned by ATS, an academic staff member:

"It's not like, oh, because you're an international student, you're special, or if you're a native or local student, then you are special. So I mix them up. They have to mingle with other internationals."

al or local students. And whenever I teach a class, I've always given a written guideline. So everything is there." (Interview with ATS – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

4.5. Theme 5: Time Orientation

In addition to intercultural communication challenges shared by both academic and non-academic staff, challenges such as time orientation are faced exclusively by academic staff. For instance, LEF, an academic staff member, expressed her views and stated:

> "*They don't wait until after class or ask later via WhatsApp. They prefer to use face-to-face communication directly after class, which is actually beneficial. They tend to push for immediate responses, possibly reflecting a cultural respect for immediacy or similar values.*" (Interview with LEF – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

Consequently, the staff managed the situation by essentially establishing clear rules and expectations:

> *"So sometimes I have to tell them that if they expect a quick response, quick answer, quick reply, they can contact my WhatsApp number, as they prefer contact on email."* (Interview with LEF – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

4.6. Theme 6: Different Contextual Understanding

Different contextual understanding, another challenge primarily faced by academic staff, can lead to conflict due to differences between high-context and low-context communication. This distinction is evident when academic staff encounter challenges with international students who convey their messages through debate, reflecting their cultural communication styles as shared by DP, an academic staff member:

> *"If they have questions, they would be so direct, ask questions, and so up to a debate to some extent, because I remember that one time I was talking and having conversation related to Design and then this one student somehow did not agree with what I said, and then this guy started to throw in facts and then start a debate in a way."* (Interview with DP – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

Furthermore, the academic staff employed a solution by demonstrating understanding and accepting the students' way of communicating. Additionally, they paused the conversation and offered the student the opportunity to discuss the issue after class. It was found that the student did not perceive the interaction as a debate.

> "*and then, when the class stopped, and then I asked, 'Do you want to continue, or do you want to just go on with your day?' And then he said, 'No, it's fine, Miss. I get what you're saying. He said that it was a fun class in the end. 'A fun time, you know, doing the discussion, and so on. So thank you, Miss. It's fine. It was really fun talking to you. Even though he might probably think that he's not debating*" (Interview with DP – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

4.7. Theme 7: Different Interpretation of Informal Communication

Last but not least, a challenge faced by academic staff involves different perceptions and interpretations of humor and informal communication. In this case, it required recognizing that the issue was a misunderstanding between the lecturer's intentions and the student's interpretation:

> *"Recently, we had a problem with a lecturer. I think this lecturer did something like a joke, and the student was disappointed. Then we also talked to the lecturers themselves. Finally, we found out the problem was just a misunderstanding because the student was disappointed and reported it to her parents, who are also members of the consulate. That's why we are concerned about the situation."* (ES – academic staff).

How humor and informal communication vary significantly across cultures. Since the staff might not fully understand how the students might interpret certain actions or messages, it is important to clarify matters to prevent misunderstandings:

> *"So we need to be mindful of cultural differences in humor. Clearly articulate expectations, instructions, and any humor or informal language during lectures to avoid misunderstandings. If it has already happened, we need to respond promptly and perhaps offer a sincere apology if it makes the student feel offended."* (Interview with ES – academic staff, 11 July 2024).

5. Discussion

The results of the identified challenges and solutions will be discussed below, relating them to theories, literature studies, and existing research reports to gain a deeper understanding of their presence and underlying causes.

5.1. Challenges Faced by Academic and Non-Academic Staff

5.1.1. Theme 1: Language Barrier

Due to these perceived language barriers, such as fluency and dialect, the university staff noted that they impacted students' ability to grasp instructions, required the use of additional tools for understanding, and hindered students from fully expressing what they meant. According to Brown and Holloway, these barriers, which are considered a 'practical issue', can lead to misunderstandings, affect academic performance, and hinder the overall support provided to students [27].

Moreover, the staff were doing their best to understand the students by guessing what they meant, explaining slowly, and asking them to repeat if necessary. The academic staff went the extra mile by providing individual explanations. This approach signifies a diminished focus on personal goals and a heightened emphasis on the objectives of others [21, 22]. In other words, the university staff are using the Obliging conflict management style to overcome language barriers related to fluency and dialect.

5.2. Theme 2: Compliance with Regulations

Five non-academic staff and one academic staff member reported that compliance with regulations such as class attendance, clothing guidelines, and immigration policies poses a significant challenge. This can be explained by Uncertainty Avoidance, which refers to how much individuals or cultures tolerate ambiguity [13]. Differences in uncertainty avoidance between staff and international students contribute to communication challenges, as European students may be more relaxed about regulations.

Power distance also affects compliance; international students from cultures with lower power distance may be more willing to conform to dress codes and regulations set by the university and authorities. To address these challenges, staff implemented various strategies. Non-academic staff used an integrating approach, empathizing with students for mutual satisfaction, and a compromising style to accommodate special requests [21, 22]. Both groups also employed a Dominating style to enforce regulations and sought third-party assistance from IBuddy students to support international students. Academic staff sometimes ask non-academic staff to remind students about policies.

5.3. Challenges Faced Exclusively by Non-Academic Staff:

5.3.1. Theme 3: Cultural Comparison

The staff reported that students often compare rules and perceive the regulations in their home country as superior. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view one's own culture as superior and to use one's cultural norms to judge the behaviors and practices of people from other cultures [28]. This can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in intercultural communication, as individuals may misinterpret or undervalue the cultural practices of others due to their own cultural biases.

The staff member empathized with the students' perspectives while consistently reminding them of the university regulations they need to follow. This approach relates to the integrating conflict management style, which involves thoroughly exploring the issue and understanding the interests of all parties involved to reach a mutually acceptable and beneficial resolution [21, 22].

5.4. Challenges Faced Exclusively by Academic Staff

5.4.1. Theme 4: Social Integration

Some staff reported that international students, particularly those from the same country, tend to group together and speak their native language in class. This behavior, noted in various studies, often stems from the comfort of sharing a language, especially in environments that may induce anxiety or uncertainty in intercultural interactions. The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory suggests that such grouping helps students manage the stress of adapting to a new culture by providing a sense of safety [28]. For example, the tendency of Chinese international students to form these groups is well-documented and can hinder their cultural adaptation and participation in the host society's academic and social systems. While these groupings offer short-term comfort, they may limit opportunities for improving English proficiency and engaging fully in the learning community.

To address this, one staff member encourages international students to consistently speak English in class, benefiting both lecturers and students. This approach aligns with the integrating conflict management style, focusing on exploring the issue and understanding the interests of all parties to reach mutually beneficial resolutions [21, 22]. Another staff member employs the dominating conflict management style, using their authority to establish consistent rules for all students, preventing any special treatment. This perspective is supported by others who argue that teaching should emphasize universal learning aspects rather than focusing on students' ethnic backgrounds [29].

5.5. Theme 5: Time Orientation

In addition to intercultural communication challenges shared by both academic and non-academic staff, challenges such as Time Orientation are faced exclusively by academic staff, particularly because they often have direct interactions with international students and may engage in formal and informal conversations.

These findings relate to Hall [15] theory of time orientation, particularly his concepts of monochronic and polychronic time. Cultures with a monochronic time orientation value direct, immediate communication and prefer handling one task at a time [30]. Students who seek immediate responses and prefer face-to-face interaction after class are displaying this monochronic orientation, valuing the immediacy of interaction and quick resolution of issues.

To manage this situation, the staff employed a dominating approach, using their authority as lecturers to establish clear rules and expectations for how students should communicate if they expect a faster response [21, 22]. Research underlines the importance of considering the communication patterns of different ethnic communities in educational interactions. It is evident that teaching and learning styles are shaped by such communication styles.

5.6. Theme 6: Different Contextual Understanding

Different contextual understandings can lead to conflict due to the differences between high-context and low-context communication. Individuals from high-context cultures focus on physical surroundings, nonverbal cues, and broader

contexts, emphasizing trust and relationship-building. In contrast, those from low-context cultures prioritize direct verbal messages and task completion over relationships [15]. This distinction often poses challenges for academic staff when interacting with international students who communicate through assertive debate, reflecting their cultural styles.

To address this, academic staff adopted an Obliging conflict management style by understanding and accepting the students' communication methods, thereby prioritizing the students' objectives. They also employed an Integrating style by pausing the conversation and inviting the student to discuss the issue after class, which involves exploring the matter thoroughly to understand the interests of all parties and reach a mutually beneficial resolution [21, 22].

5.7. Theme 7: Different Interpretations of Informal Communication

A significant challenge for academic staff is the differing perceptions of humor and informal communication, particularly during direct interactions with international students. Misunderstandings often arise from a gap between the lecturer's intentions and the students' interpretations. Humor can vary greatly across cultures; what seems like a harmless joke in one culture may be offensive in another [31].

To address this, staff recommended adopting the students' perspective. Since they may not fully grasp how students interpret certain actions or messages, clarifying these matters is essential to prevent misunderstandings. This approach aligns with the Obliging conflict management style, emphasizing the objectives of others [21, 22].

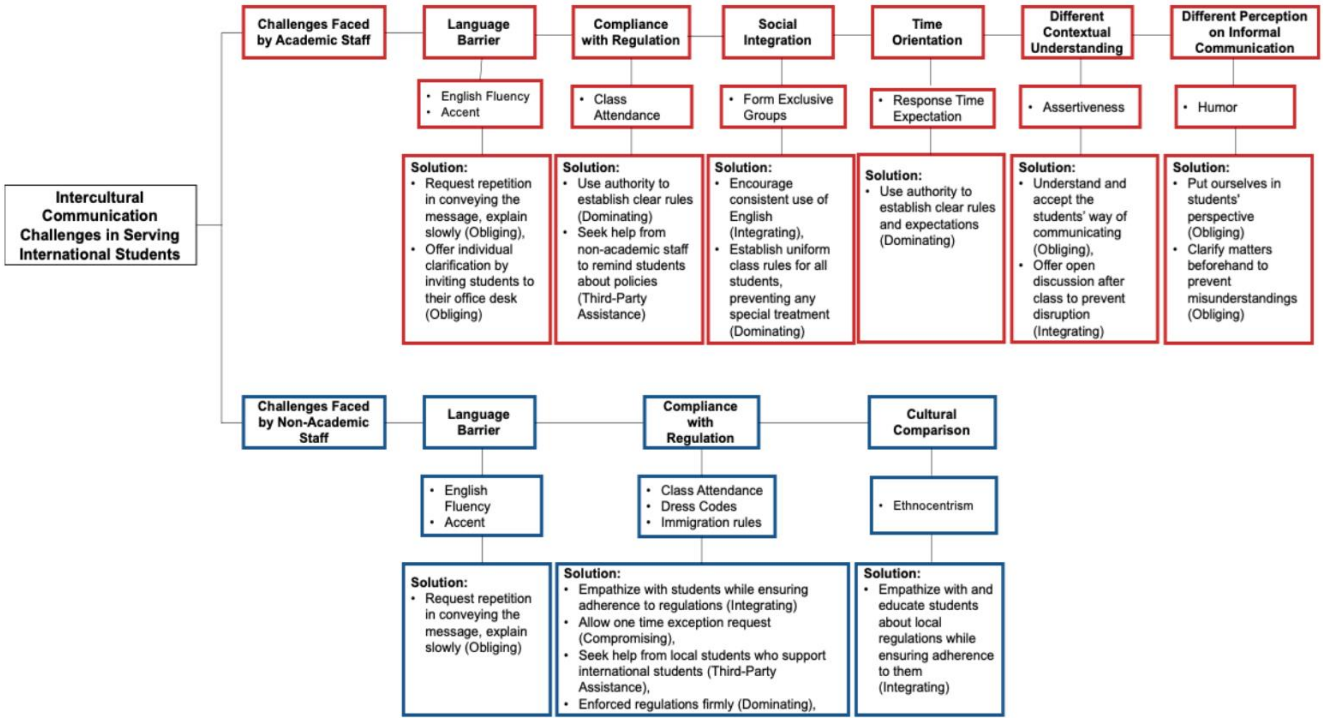

Figure 2.
Academic Communication Model: A Solution Framework for Overcoming the Challenges of Serving International Students at an International University in Jakarta.

6. Conclusion

Based on research conducted at an international university in Jakarta, this study aims to develop an academic communication model and a solution framework to address the challenges, which is shown on Figure 2. For an enlarged view of this figure, readers may access it via the following link: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16487044 for enhanced clarity.

The study highlights various intercultural communication challenges faced by staff when working with international students, including language barriers, compliance with regulations, cultural comparisons, social integration, time orientation, different contextual understandings, and varying interpretations of informal communication. Moreover, staff employ various conflict management styles integrating, dominating, obliging, compromising, and seeking third-party help.

Contrary to research suggestions that individuals from high-context cultures like Indonesians prefer indirect conflict management styles such as Obliging and Avoiding, the research shows that university staff also use Dominating, Integrating, and Compromising styles. For challenges related to language barriers and different perceptions of informal communication, staff mainly use Obliging. However, for compliance with regulations, they employ a variety of styles, including Dominating, Integrating, Compromising, and Third-Party Help, depending on the specific regulatory or policy issues. This finding contrasts with the idea that high-context cultures avoid external mediation.

7. Recommendations and Future Research

Based on the findings and conclusions, this research recommends that during the onboarding process for new international students, staff provide a briefing on potential intercultural communication challenges. This will help both

parties become aware of these challenges early on and explore potential solutions proactively. Additionally, the university should consider supporting the improvement of English proficiency among non-academic staff to enhance communication effectiveness.

The limitations of this study are twofold. Firstly, the perspectives of university staff serving master's students were not included in the data analysis, which limits the scope of insights. Secondly, the study focused on a single case, potentially restricting the generalizability of the findings to other institutions. Future research should address these limitations by including staff who serve different academic levels and by expanding the study to multiple institutions and countries to enhance its generalizability. Additionally, investigating other factors impacting intercultural communication and conducting longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how these challenges evolve over time. Furthermore, evaluating the effectiveness of the Academic Communication Model in various institutional settings could help refine it and assess its impact on improving communication and reducing misunderstandings. Despite its limitations, this research serves as a foundation for further studies in other institutions in Indonesia and beyond.

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