

## Communication competence of Indonesian workers in intercultural interaction in Munich and Canberra

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### ABSTRACT

The discourse of intercultural communication competence is increasingly important in the globalized world. However, there need to be more studies reported on the communication competence of Indonesian workers in intercultural interaction, particularly in the host country Germany and Australia. This study investigates communication competence in the intercultural interaction of Indonesian workers in two cities, Munich and Canberra. It focuses on intercultural challenges encountered by Indonesian workers working at different corporations and organizations in Munich and Canberra. Using qualitative methods, we examine Indonesian workers' intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and language competence in the host cities. This ethnographic study is based on interviews and informal conversations with Indonesian workers in Munich and Canberra and observations through the engagement of the researchers in the various Indonesian Diaspora community in the two cities. Based on thematic analysis, two empirical findings are essential to everyday intercultural interaction. First, intercultural awareness and sensitivity explain the knowledge and experiences of Indonesian workers on local rules and regulations, culture, and history of the host cities. Second, language competence describes the ability of Indonesian workers to understand the accents and dialects (German Bavaria and English Australian) and to overcome language barriers in everyday work and community life. The study concludes that participants have different experiences implementing communication competence in everyday interaction. It depends on the intercultural interaction intensity of Indonesian workers with their colleagues and the local community.

**Keywords:** Communication; competence; intercultural; sensitivity; sojourner

### *Kompetensi komunikasi tenaga kerja Indonesia dalam interaksi antarbudaya di Munich dan Canberra*

### ABSTRAK

*Wacana* kompetensi komunikasi antarbudaya semakin penting di dunia global. Namun, laporan studi tentang kompetensi komunikasi pekerja Indonesia dalam interaksi antar budaya, terutama di negara tuan rumah Jerman dan Australia. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kompetensi komunikasi dalam interaksi antarbudaya pekerja Indonesia di dua kota, Munich dan Canberra. Studi ini berfokus pada tantangan antar budaya yang dihadapi oleh pekerja Indonesia yang bekerja di berbagai perusahaan dan organisasi di Munich dan Canberra. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, kami menguji kesadaran dan kepekaan antarbudaya serta kompetensi bahasa pekerja Indonesia di kota-kota tuan rumah. Studi etnografi ini didasarkan pada wawancara dan percakapan informal dengan tenaga kerja Indonesia di Munich dan Canberra serta observasi melalui keterlibatan peneliti di berbagai komunitas Diaspora Indonesia di dua kota tersebut. Berdasarkan analisis tematik, dua temuan empiris merupakan faktor penting dalam interaksi antarbudaya sehari-hari. Pertama, kesadaran dan kepekaan antarbudaya menjelaskan pengetahuan dan pengalaman pekerja Indonesia tentang aturan dan peraturan lokal, budaya, dan sejarah kota tuan rumah. Kedua, kompetensi bahasa menggambarkan kemampuan tenaga kerja Indonesia untuk memahami aksen dan dialek (Jerman Bavaria dan Inggris Australia) dan mengatasi hambatan bahasa dalam pekerjaan sehari-hari dan kehidupan masyarakat. Hasil studi menyimpulkan bahwa partisipan memiliki pengalaman yang berbeda dalam mengimplementasikan kompetensi komunikasi dalam interaksi sehari-hari. Hal ini tergantung pada intensitas interaksi antarbudaya pekerja Indonesia dengan rekan kerja dan masyarakat setempat.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** Komunikasi; kompetensi; antarbudaya; kepekaan; pendatang

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## INTRODUCTION

This study explores the intercultural experiences of Indonesian workers in two cities, Munich (Germany) and Canberra (Australia). We investigate the communication competence of the everyday life of Indonesian workers in Canberra and Munich to focus on two main research questions. First, what intercultural awareness and sensitivity shall present Indonesian workers in the host cities to reduce cultural barriers, and how they implement them in everyday life? Second, how do Indonesian workers perform language competence in the workplace and community life?

Previous studies presented the intercultural experiences of Indonesian students in Australia and the United Kingdom. The first research analyzes the re-actualization of Indonesian diaspora students in maintaining a national identity on the Australian continent using Hofstede's cultural dimensions. For example, one of the informants' quotations in the paper mentions an egalitarian relationship between lecturers and students compared to the lecturers – students relationship in Indonesia. A low power distance index in Australian society provides an egalitarian relationship between professors and students so that the lecturer is positioned as a partner for students in academic discussions (Fernando, Marta, & Hidayati, 2020). Intercultural communication experiences in the United Kingdom describe one of their empirical findings of Indonesian postgraduate students in the UK. Their intercultural communication experiences facilitate or hinder academic engagement, including sociocultural, institutional, and individual factors. The hindering elements include transitioning to a new educational environment, intense academic workload, 'expert' or 'boring tutors, linguistic barriers, and uneasiness (Aisha & Mulyana, 2019). Although these two studies only describe Indonesians in an educational environment, these two findings can provide an overview of how Indonesians in everyday life confront the process of intercultural experiences.

Few studies report non-western workers, such as Indonesian sojourners working for multinational companies or other organizations in foreign countries, especially Germany and Australia. Research reported by Efendi et al. (2021) about going global in the international

migration of nurses needs to describe a destination country explicitly. However, one of the findings states that language barriers are one of the essential findings in competing in the global markets. Indonesian nurses shall improve their language skills to obtain international certification and adjust to foreign work environments (Efendi et al., 2021). Other researchers, Panggabean et al. identified the competencies of Indonesian sojourners and local employees in Asian working groups between Indonesia and China/Tionghoa and Indonesia and Singapore (Tjitra, Ramakrishnan, & Panggabean, 2012; Panggabean, Murniati, & Tjitra, 2013). Many studies are reported on the expatriation of multinational companies' members in the host country Indonesia. Suutari et al. examine the interaction of Finnish expatriates with Indonesian employees (Suutari, Raharjo, & Riikkilä, 2002), Research on Canadian expatriate managers working in non-governmental organizations (Russel & Dickie, 2007), and research on how human resource development interventions help expatriates adapt to Javanese culture (Pruetipibultham, 2012) and transnational life among expatriates in Indonesia (Fechter, 2016).

Moreover, Koswara (2022) reports that communication and leadership approaches are two cultural challenges to practicing German corporate culture in the host country Indonesia. In addition, Indonesian and German expatriates contested the culture of integrity and family-like (*kekeluargaan*) working relationships in everyday work life (Koswara, 2022). Against this backdrop, we encourage investigating the intercultural competence of Indonesian at companies or organizations in Munich and Canberra. This preliminary research examines the communication competence of Indonesian workers who live and temporarily settle in Canberra and Munich.

The selection of the two cities is also based on the differences and characteristics. Munich is the capital of Bavaria and the third largest city in Germany after Berlin and Hamburg. Munich is connected by train to all major cities in Germany and Austria, making it a significant hub for high-speed passenger trains in Germany and Europe. This strategic location impacts the ease of mobility of people from and to the city of Munich, such as tourist attractions, jobs, and higher education. Several prominent German

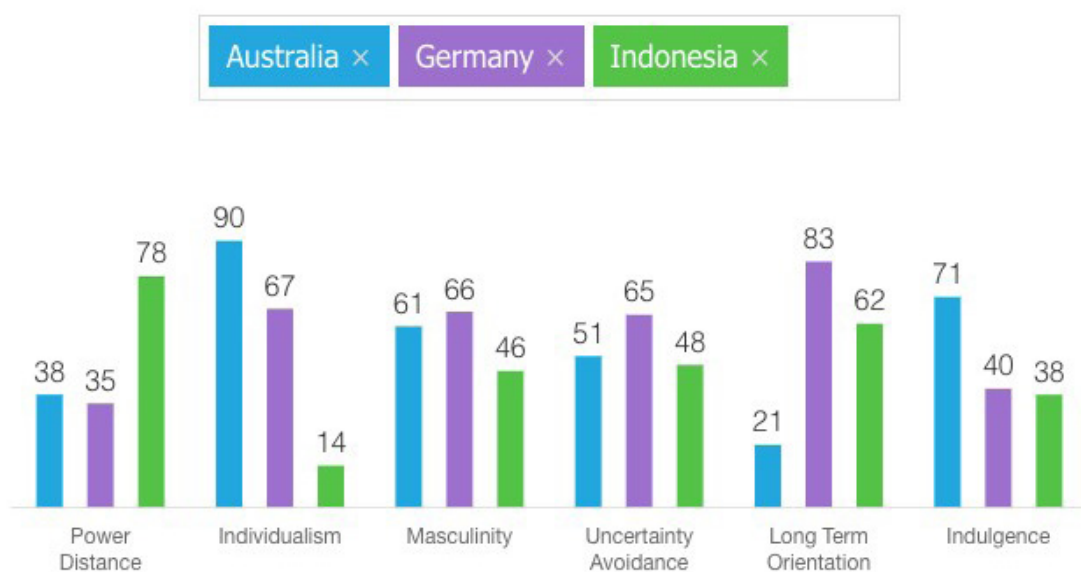
multinational companies have their headquarters in the City of Munich, for example, Bavarian Motor Werk (BMW) AG (*Aktionsgesellschaft*), Siemens AG, Infineon, and many expatriates outside the City of Munich or outside Germany work in this city. Thus, the city has become a melting pot for tourists, businesspeople, international workers, and students. Moreover, Munich still maintains strong local traditions and culture.

On the other side, Canberra is different from other big cities in Australia. It is developed naturally. Canberra is Australia’s seat of government and international diplomatic liaison. The urban planning that is built aims to support these interests. Canberra has become the center of the Australian government, diplomatic activity, and a student city. Canberra also has implications for the distribution of demographics that includes various professions, including government employees, politicians, diplomats, students, and other jobs that support the activities of previous occupations. In addition, the City of Canberra is not the primary choice for seeking fame and fortune for most Australians. Other cities, such as Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, and Brisbane, are more metropolitan than Canberra. Young residents prefer to live in these cities. Nonetheless, many Australians choose Canberra City as a retirement destination because the city is relatively quiet compared to other big cities in Australia. It can also be seen

from the demographic distribution of relatively older Australians than foreign nationals living in the City of Canberra.

Another consideration relates to the cross-cultural research of the three countries, Australia, Germany, and Indonesia. Previous research on national cross-cultural analysis has reported that Indonesia has cultural differences from Germany and Australia. As shown in Figure 1, Indonesia has a higher power distance and collectivism–individualism index than those countries (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

As defined by Hofstede, the power distance dimension is “the extent to which a less powerful level of power perceived by members of institutions and organizations in a country expect and accept the power that is distributed unequally” (2010). Communication is indirect and negative feedback is often hidden. The high-power distance also means that Indonesian co-workers expect to be directed by their supervisor or manager. Hofstede calls it a classic relationship between a teacher and a dynamic student that applies and is applied in Indonesia. People from western countries, such as Australia and Germany, may be surprised by the apparent, socially accepted, broad and unequal disparities between rich and poor. Consequently, Indonesian citizens are suspected of having different tendencies to apply their



Source: (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010)

**Figure 1 Cultural Differences between Australia, Germany, and Indonesia**

intercultural competence when dealing with leaders, managers, or local people with higher power levels in Australia and Germany.

Hofstede defines the cultural dimension of individualism as “the degree of interdependence that a society maintains among its members” (2010). It relates to a person’s self-image, which is defined in terms of “I” (I) and “We” (we); within individualist societies, people tend to take care of themselves and their immediate relatives. While in a collectivist society, individuals belong to a group that maintains them in the form of an exchange or loyalty rewards. Based on Figure 1, Australia (score of 90) is more individualistic than Germany (67) and Indonesia (14). The overall value in Australian society is that they are more likely to care for themselves and their immediate family.

Consequently, the differences in the three countries’ cultural dimensions are thought to influence how Indonesians in the two cities display their intercultural experiences, especially when they interact with local people in everyday work and community life. Although the Indonesian people involved in this study do not all work for organizations or companies in Australia and Germany, the way they make contact and interact with local people has an impact on the tendency of how everyone provides or demonstrates their intercultural competence. Thus, it can be accepted or able to be taken by the neighborhood. In addition to intercultural competence, developing specific skills, characteristics, and competencies at an individual level can significantly influence how intercultural conflict and collaboration are managed (Liu, Adair, Tjosvold, & Poliakova, 2018).

Discussion of the topic of intercultural competence has become an essential discourse in various fields. This topic has been studied starting in the business field (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006; Stehr, 2011), areas of education including research, administration, and university marketing (Weidenmann, Straub, & Nothnagel, 2010), teacher education and various other fields of education (Cushner & Mahon, 2009) as well as other activities in daily life (Thomas, 2009). Competence is the individual capability determined by contextual and situational conditions (Moosmüller & Schönhuth, 2009). It is about the authority, responsibility, and

ability to adjust to the situations. Spitzberg and Changnon describe competence as “frequently related to understanding (accuracy, clarity, co-orientation, overlap of meanings), relationship development (attraction, intimacy), satisfaction (communication satisfaction, relational satisfaction, relational quality), effectiveness (goal achievement, efficiency, institutional success, negotiation success), appropriateness (legitimacy, acceptance, assimilation), and adaptation” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In addition, Trompenaars & Woollians characterize competency and competence. Competency is skills and knowledge that must be possessed or met to enter a situation to achieve a high level or level of performance. At the same time, competence (competencies) is a system of minimum standards and objective behavior demonstrated through performance and outputs. In other words, competency is what you know (what you know), which includes skills and knowledge. While competence is what you do (what you do) and includes what you apply to the knowledge you have in everyday life or the world of practice. The definition of competency is “widely used in the United States, while competence is more commonly used in the European tradition” (Trompenaars & Woollians, 2009).

Moreover, Trompenaars & Woollians further define intercultural competence as the capability of successful communication and effective collaboration with other people or cultures through recognizing differences and respecting different points of view. Thus, “intercultural competence often shows communication and working with other cultures” (Trompenaars & Woollians, 2009). Meanwhile, Deardorff defines intercultural competence as the ability to interact with members of different cultures in a practical, appropriate, and successful manner (2006). Furthermore, Deardorff also invites several experts to conclude a definition of intercultural competence as: “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2006).

Intercultural competence conceptualizes from two perspectives (Moosmüller & Schönhuth, 2009). First, the efficiency approach views intercultural competence and aims to make intercultural communication

more efficient. Second, the growth approach emphasizes fostering individuals' and groups' further development and growth (Moosmüller & Schönhuth, 2009). In addition, they explain that intercultural competence is associated with key qualifications, a concept developed by the labor and education researcher Dieter Mertens in the 1970s. This key qualification encompasses (1) social competence. It includes sub-topics of communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, and empathy skills; (2) competence method. It possesses analytical skills, creativity, willingness to learn, and rhetorical skills; (3) self-competence. It contains sub-topics of productivity, capability, flexibility, reliability, independence, adaptability, and stress resistance; (4) action competence. It relates to the ability to act in a required way or appropriate to the situation while being aware of one's interests (Moosmüller & Schönhuth, 2009).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method through an ethnographic approach to determine the communication competence of Indonesians in two cities, Munich and Canberra. The qualitative method is the embodiment of assumptions the basis author believes are based on theory adhered to (Nugraha, SJORaida, & Novianti, 2022) communication competence. As we define in the introduction section, intercultural competence is "about what you do" regarding known knowledge and skills that are applied in everyday life, so direct experience of the subject being studied is vital because every individual has a different "way of doing." Thus, ethnography is essential for formulating how individuals or groups account for and explain a phenomenon in an environment based on everyday interactions (Schwartzman, 1993). In addition, the use of ethnographic is essential because of the nature of the questions asked about attitudes toward culture, including intercultural competence and other attitudes related to differences in the culture of origin (home country, Indonesia) and the culture of the current residence (host country, Germany, or Australia).

Although the reason this study selects Munich and Canberra may seem due to the

researcher's convenience by being in the two countries as students, we must pay attention that one of the most important aspects of qualitative studies data collection is establishing and gaining access rapport. Being in Munich and Canberra means that the researchers were very familiar with the circumstances in each respected city, easing the data collection process and approaching informants to gain rapport (Babbie, 2014).

Data were collected through participatory observation, interviews, and informal conversations. Comments were made through the direct experience of each researcher in two different cities. The first researcher has undertaken observations from February 2015 to April 2022 in Munich through interaction with the Indonesian community, both members of other communities, such as culture-based communities, religion, and hobbies. The second researcher carried out observations from October 2019 – April 2022 in Canberra through interactions in the workplace during part-time work and Indonesian community associations in the fields of religion, sports, and hobbies. The experience of interaction with various Indonesian communities in the two countries is expected to provide empirical experiences on how intercultural competence must be displayed in the host country without forgetting the cultural roots of the home country, Indonesia. Schwartzman emphasizes that to define the characteristics of ethnography research is that "the investigator goes into the field to learn about culture instead of bringing the area into the investigator's" (Schwartzman, 1993).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two cities in March 2020 with eleven (11) Indonesian citizens living in Munich and Canberra (Table 1). Due to the confidentiality of our informants, we present anonymously using the codes IP01\_Canberra\_Male to IP11\_Munich\_Male. These informants comprised four women and seven men with various educational backgrounds, i.e., psychology, communication, information systems, computers, medical, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering. Regarding the workplace, four people work as embassy staff at the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra, while the others are in different jobs ranging from research assistants, cleaners, IT staff, medical staff, and automotive staff in Canberra and

Munich. The interviews used a semi-structured guide because of the variety and background of education, occupation, gender, and reasons for living in the two cities. The discussions varied with a time range from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. The interview process in the City of Canberra was carried out directly.

The results of interviews in Munich City were recorded using a voice recorder in mp3 format and Canberra City using a recording application on a smartphone device with mp4 format. In contrast, in the City of Munich, it was carried out via audio calls using the WhatsApp media feature because of the lockdown during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The interview was conducted using Bahasa Indonesia. We focus

on asking several questions, such as cultural knowledge of the host country, language proficiency, social interaction in the workplace and community lives, cooperation, and communication skills.

Exchange through meetings organized by the Indonesian Diaspora community in two cities. The two researchers carried out informal conversations through interactions in everyday life. There are regular meetings once a month, once a year, or spontaneous irregular meetings. The interaction with the research subjects provides a flowing space for conversation to explore experiences, opinions, and views about the cultural differences between the home country and host cities, Munich and Canberra.

**Table 1 Interview Partner (IP)**

<b>Informants</b>	<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Occupational</b>	<b>Previous Countries of Residence</b>
IP01_Canberra_Male	Master (Psychology in Indonesia)	Research Assistant	
IP02_Canberra_Female	Bachelor (Communication in Indonesia)	Cleaning Staff	
IP03_Canberra_Female	Bachelor (Journalism in Indonesia)	Embassy Staff	Canada
IP04_Canberra_Male	Bachelor (Information System) in Indonesia)	Embassy Staff	
IP05_Canberra_Male	Bachelor (Computer Accounting in Indonesia)	Embassy Staff	
IP06_Canberra_Male	Master (Management, International Program in Indonesia)	Embassy Staff	
IP07_Munich_Female	Bachelor and Master (Digital Visual Communication in Indonesia)	Staff in media digital	Singapore
IP08_Munich_Female	Medical Doctor (Indonesia) and Fortbildung in Developmental Pediatric (Germany)	Expert Assistant	
IP09_Munich_Male	Bachelor (Electrical Engineering in Indonesia)	IT Staff	United States of America and Thailand
IP10_Munich_Male	Diploma III (Mechanical Engineering in Indonesia) and Bachelor (Electrical Engineering in Germany)	Automotive Staff	
IP11_Munich_Male	Bachelor (Electrical Engineering in Indonesia) and Master (Software Engineering in Germany)	IT Staff	Belgian

Source: Research Results, 2022

Research materials from different sources were analyzed through the following stages. (1) analysis of the results of the researchers' fieldnotes; (2) transcribe the interview results; (3) codification of interview transcripts to obtain sub-topics that are in following the research questions; (4) thematic analysis and connecting interview transcripts with fieldnotes; and (5) some relevant interview transcripts were translated into English and use it as the quotation in the result and discussion section.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on a thematic analysis of interview transcripts and field notes, we examine two empirical findings as the essential communication competence for Indonesian workers to adjust to intercultural interaction in the host cities of Munich and Canberra. First, intercultural awareness and sensitivity explain the cognitive competence of Indonesian workers regarding local culture, regulations, and history. Second, language competence describes the experiences of Indonesian workers regarding the knowledge of the language used in the workplace and community life.

**Intercultural awareness and sensitivity** are initial competence to acknowledge the host cities' local culture, regulations, and historical development. It becomes the capital to be well adjusted to the new environment. Sensitivity (affective process) and awareness (cognitive process) are two of the three key elements of intercultural communication competence (Arghode, Lakshmanan, & Nafukho, 2021). Initial knowledge of history, local customs, regulations, and the cultural and social norms of the host country are part of the sociocultural adjustment (Abugre, 2018) that encourages confidence in daily working life. Participants who previously studied or worked in Germany or Australia find it easier to adjust to working colleagues than others with no experience living or working in both countries. Mr. ES, an electrical engineer, first performed at a Japanese company in Jakarta before he departed for US America, Brazil, and Thailand. He then landed in Munich to work as an expatriate at a Finnish company. Although he has experienced working with people from different cultures, it takes time to learn about

local situations, including the people in Munich. A neighbor once reprimanded him because he threw a bottle in the garbage on Sunday.

Germans appreciate rules and regulations. Sunday is family time for Germans. Sundays should be quiet. Even when it comes to noise, there are rules. Until 10:00 pm, we have to reduce some activities that disturb our neighbors. Sunday is unique, do not make noises. Once on Sunday morning, I was throwing away the bottles and then being flicked by a neighbor close to the disposal until She said, "it is Sunday," but without offending, just a reminder. (IP09\_Munich\_Male)

Figure 2 and 3 show disposal for textiles and bottles, including its schedule in one of the sub-urban cities in Bavaria, Germany. Disposals such as plastics, paper, bio waste, metal, wood, and others have separate schedules and disposal management. Figure 2 illustrates bottle and textile disposal. It provides white, brown, and green bottles for bottle disposal, while textiles disposals offer used shoes and clothes.

For newcomers arriving in Germany, most people had a feeling of doing something wrong all the time. There are many rules and regulations. It becomes complicated to know all, even for someone who is preparing in advance. For some time, until people knew how to navigate doing many things, managing simple things like parking or taking the garbage out suddenly became a mission. It is because people should first manage what kind of trashes will be thrown up and must refer to its strict schedule. For instance, figure 3 displays the schedule of bottle



Source: Taken by First Author, 2022

**Figure 2 Disposal for Textile and Bottles**



Source: Taken by First Author, 2022

**Figure 3 Disposal for Brown Bottle and Schedule**

disposal. It explains that citizens shall consider the schedule of disposal. As it is written on the poster, people can throw up bottles' disposal from Monday to Friday from 07.00 am to 07.00 pm and on Saturday from 08.00 pm to 06.00 pm. People should not drop bottle disposals on Sundays and other significant holidays because throwing out bottles is quite noisy, and Sunday is a vital rest time (*Ruhe Zeit*) in Germany.

Appreciation for rules and regulations influence time management. Mr. MP, an IT staff in Munich, emphasizes that punctual-time culture is fundamental in German work culture. When he worked in a Japanese company in Jakarta, there was still time tolerance. It might be because infrastructure systems such as public transportation need to fully support the mobility of employees from remote to their workplaces.

Discipline culture does not come coincidentally. The supporting facilities and infrastructure built and managed by the local governments in both cities could minimize the violations committed by their citizens. For example, public transportation is designed for time management, not in hours, but in seconds, as the German term *jede sekunde zählt* (every second counts). Regarding punctual-time culture, Mr. FD, a vehicle test staff in the automobile industry in Munich, tries to adjust the work rhythm of the Germans because some Germans are also different. It depends on the work team. He usually adapts his work style to his counterparts. If most of his co-workers are old, his colleagues frequently remind him, "slow, slow ...". Unlike younger co-workers, they usually work faster. Although he endeavors to maintain time discipline in the German work

environment, it is automatically disappeared when he meets Indonesian friends.

[...] surprisingly, that discipline tends to disappear when you meet Indonesians. Meanwhile, if you make a *Termin* (appointment) with the Germans, it feels like you have to be ready half an hour or fifteen minutes in advance; it is like you are already on the fence. But if you meet Indonesians, most of the Indonesians here are still employing rubber time or something not fully committed to their time commitment, and there are still people who carry over *jam karet* (rubber time) culture [...] (IP10\_Munich\_Male)

Indonesian workers in Canberra recognize that punctual time in an individualistic culture shall perform cautiously. Work and personal time are separated. It should be distinct (Koswara, 2022). For instance, Mr. AW, staff at the Indonesian embassy, shared his story on managing time when he dealt with local people. Although he works at Indonesian organizations and most of his employees are Indonesians, his clients are Australians, then he must treat them differently when organizing an appointment with Australians.

Their time management is better compared to Indonesians. When we are dealing with someone, for example, arranging an appointment, let us say at 07.00 am, they will be ready at 07.00 am. It means we must previously prepare because they are punctual. If the appointment is at 07.00 am, they are already 07.00 am in front of the office. So, time management is vital from their side [...] (IP06\_Canberra\_Male)

Mr. AW argues government provides rules and regulations to offer daily guidelines for citizens, including immigrants. Those rules are written as a textbook, "by the book, it is just like a textbook, it has standardized on the textbook, is like what kind of rules they should follow." Basic and advanced knowledge of government rules avoids misunderstanding when dealing with local government and host citizens.

Mr. FD has been working for more than ten years in the automotive industry in Munich. He studied in Duisburg before he joined at automotive industry in Munich. His experiences



in Duisburg were trying to understand one of the German cultures, privacy - data protection. He said personal privacy is the basis for developing cooperation competence with his German colleagues. In general, the privacy issue is indeed decisive in the company system. For example, "Datenschutz" (data protection) relates to the date of birth, family member, home address, and religion.

[...] In German culture, people should not ask too many personal questions because it is taboo. Unlike in our culture, people meet you for the first time and sometimes ask, "Are you married yet?", "How old are you?". So, here, people cannot ask those questions directly unless initiated; those are too sensitive, especially if they do not know our background; asking questions too deep and very personal should be minimized. Here, in general, "Datenschutz" (data protection) is high; even if they talk about all kinds of things, they do not want to open it directly, particularly for someone who just met [...] (IP10\_Munich\_Male)

As Hofstede stated, Australians and Germans have higher individualism scores than Indonesians. People in both countries maintain their personal space as a realm of privacy, which is often difficult for others to penetrate, even their groups. Some of the issues keep in the private area, such as religion, family and personal life, sexual orientation, ethnic background, even asking about age, assessing a person's physique, and others. These issues frequently consider taboo to ask unless they first open up and believe that private space is open to others. For instance, in Germany, individual and professional interests are separate. Professional proximity in the workplace is not automatically related to unique juxtaposition. Ms. AS still needs help perceiving the German people's professional and personal closeness. Ms. AS perceives an evident separation of professional and personal space. She explains that building personal relationships in Indonesian culture can be done simultaneously with professional associations in the workplace, even frequently overlapping. For Germans, professional relations are the main issue over personal relations. It also aims to see how competent someone is in completing their work. The

German way of thinking emphasizes logic, trying to keep aspects of feeling in professional working relationships so that when deciding on a work assignment, it does not base on emotional factors but instead considers aspects of professionalism.

They are creating a very high barrier to making someone feel close. Even though we feel close, they do not necessarily feel that way because, in Indonesia, they are just friends and embrace it. Still, it is not easy to penetrate the defensive wall of the German people's personal space. That is what feels the most. (IP07\_Munich\_Female)

In the last four years (since 2015), especially in Germany, the issue of religion has become a topic of discussion in political debates. It is due to the number of refugees from Middle Eastern and North African countries, mainly related to public spaces for residence and places of worship. Nevertheless, government and society continually reserve religious issues in a private sphere. Germany and Australia provide space and freedom for everyone to practice their religion, not to intervene in the private sphere of religious rights. Likewise, in the workplace or community life, asking directly about the beliefs or religions of others is considered a taboo subject. However, they also appreciate hearing stories about religious issues and keeping an open mind to accept differences. Mr. AG, a research assistant at a university in Canberra, shared his experience of religious freedom as a private matter. It must be considered to keep it as a personal issue.

[...] It is just one thing that really must be considered, the issue of religion here. It is different like from Indonesia. People here, it is up to you what religion you want, whether your religion is Islam, Catholic, Christian, or Buddhist, they do not care, but if you tell them, they will appreciate it. Now the problem is that when we have a difference, people here are more open-minded and accept that difference [...] (IP01\_Canberra\_Male)

In addition, Mr. AG takes effort and time to explore the personal issues of his Australian counterparts.

[...] In Indonesia, I can talk and ask about

personal details with my counterparts, such as how many children you have. Where will you pursue your study? and how long you have been working here. In Australia, many things must be considered before you ask for their details [...] In Indonesia, we can ask for some personal information even though we just met, but here in Canberra, exploring more facts about our counterparts takes an extraordinary effort. (IP01\_Canberra\_Male)

Mr. FD describes people in Munich are a better-maintained private sphere than Germans in the previous city Duisburg. He said People in Duisburg are open, while People in Munich are rigid. He assumes the character of people in Munich because Munich is one of the Metropolitan cities in Germany, a tourist destination city, and the headquarters of several German multinational companies. Munich has been a melting pot of different cultures. Thus, it takes time for local people to understand foreign cultures and openly share their private sphere. Mr. MP is an IT Staff who previously lived in Dresden and is a resident of suburban Munich.

Daily behavioral interactions. I have lived in Dresden, Berlin, Essen, then Erding. In Erding, the people are very family-oriented, very kind, and usually address with small talk – friendly, but the key is that we must be able to speak German. I had an experience when a bicycle tire went flat; they offered to help. In Erding, the people are friendlier than in Dresden. The Munich area is more snobbish, even though the interaction is cordial. In Berlin, former East Germany still exists [...] (IP11\_Munich\_Male)

As an electro engineer at a Finland company in Munich, Mr. ES works with multicultural counterparts from different countries and regularly works on the computer. He rarely talks to his colleagues except in meetings and sometimes takes lunch time together. In community life, he lives with his family in an apartment in the central city of Munich. Indeed, his neighbors are Germans.

Because we live in Munich, Bavaria, we think people are rigid in terms of personality; they are very ignorant. When we first came to say good morning, they

were indifferent at work early in joining; it was normal because we did not know their culture. Germans are very secretive; they gather with close people only, with foreigners keeping their distance. In the US, we were also close to our friends' family at work and outside work. Meanwhile, in German culture, close friends in the office but outside the work environment are not automatically close; even though I have been working here for eight years and interacting with them, I can still feel how rigid German people are. (IP09\_Munich\_Male)

Moreover, understanding the host cities' history improves the process of adapting Indonesian workers to cultural differences. It influences people's perspectives and attitudes towards immigrants in their daily life relationships. Politically, the three countries have different socio-political developments. For example, Ms. AS said Munich was one of the cities where Hitler started his political career. Several buildings and corners of Munich became the center of German politics during the National Socialism regime. This city also became one of the priority cities that defended from the onslaught of the Allies during the second world war.

The Australian government put so much effort into respecting Aboriginal and Torres-straits islanders (indigenous Australians) and recognizing them as the original custodian of the land of Australia and that European settlers are not the original 'owners' of the lands. Knowledge related to the current position of Australia on indigenous people is a piece of essential knowledge for any people living in Australia. Respondents also recognized this aspect of Australia, allowing them to understand Australian historical culture better.

In the three following sequences, attention is where it all starts. Hofstede describes three phases to lead people to have intercultural competence – awareness, knowledge, and skills. Knowledge should follow, and skills are based on awareness, understanding, and practice (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In addition, Havey in Trompenaars and Williams mentions three essential competence areas in the conceptualization of recognition.

They are worldly consciousness, which comprises perspective consciousness and “state of the planet” awareness, fundamental cross-cultural awareness, and global dynamics, including knowledge of global dynamics and understanding human choice (Trompenaars & Woollians, 2009). Working with employees with a high level of intercultural sensitivity and respect for different cultures without prejudices is necessary. It is to achieve success in intercultural communication (Gülduran & Gürdoğan, 2021).

**Language competence** is the second essential element of developing intercultural communication competence. In general, when interacting with residents in the City of Canberra or Munich, speaking English or German, but in practice in organizations, the need for English or German is different in its use. It depends on the field of work and the workplace environment. IT jobs that spend more time working with personal computers or laptops will have fewer interactions than those in the medical field, which has to deal with patients or their parents. Likewise, suppose most of the organizational members are multinational. In that case, English becomes the language of instruction in daily work life or even Indonesian for those who work in the embassy or consular representative offices.

For Germany, language competence is one of the main requirements for obtaining a visa, except for some workers who have worked for non-German multinational companies since their arrival. Like Mr. ES’s experience, an expatriate from Indonesia who works at a Finnish Cellular Company in Munich explained that German was not a requirement for his placement in Germany. It is because he received a blue card from the beginning, as did his wife and two children, who followed a year later. The German immigration in Munich had asked him about the German language requirement when he was going to extend his residence visa to *Unbefristet* (unlimited). Still, because of its alternative nature, until the interview, Mr. ES needed a language certificate. Unlike his wife, who first prepared German at Goethe Thailand and then continued it in Munich City to attend orientation classes (*Orientierung Klass*) which is part of the integration program of the Federal Republic of Germany. The German Language Competent helps accompany her

two children who are joining public schools with the introduction to German. German education demands the participation of parents in the education process so that no matter how competent the German language is, it is crucial because all information conveyed to parents is in German. Thus, ES is self-taught in learning German through his children, neighbors, and work partners in the office.

The experience is different from Ms. AS following her husband. Her husband pursued his doctoral studies while she was taking a language preparation course at the Goethe Institute to get a language certificate as one of the requirements for getting a visa. However, her basic German language skills infrequently use because Ms. AS works in a multinational company using English as the business lingua franca in their daily work environment. The international atmosphere and work environment require members of the organization to communicate in English. Even if there are employees outside Germany who speak German as a form of respect for the local culture, German employees refuse to talk to German, except outside working hours if the motive for communicating is to improve competence. For Ms. AS, using English as a daily language makes it easier to complete daily work tasks because it is more fluent than German. One year of experience living in Singapore has become a distinct point in maintaining English language skills in the context of interpersonal relationships in an international environment. In addition, Ms. AS’s competence in German is still at a basic level, and it can only be used in everyday life when encountering neighbors or shopping at supermarkets. Even when consulting with teachers at schools, Ms. AS frequently speaks English because there is difficulty in using German grammar in formulating sentences.

This situation contrasts with the experience of Ms. CS, a medical professional who works in a clinical-based school; German language proficiency at the intermediate to the advanced level (B2 – C2) is an absolute requirement to adjust and interact in a daily work environment. Previously, Ms. CS attended the education level and became a *Gast Ärztin* (guest doctor) which combines theoretical and practical teaching so that the experience of attending education in Germany makes it easier to use German according to their needs. In addition, more than

ten years of interaction with German partners working in Indonesia also helped him eliminate the *bule* barrier.

She must perform at least three German competencies to support her daily activities, working with colleagues, patients, and parents. (1) formal medical German due to discussions or coordination with interdisciplinary work teams in case conferences, presentations, or written reports; (2) general medical German that must be understood by the patient or the patient's parents, for example, in discussing medical manages in a language that understood in general; and (3) non-formal German when interacting directly with work partners and teams from other units, for example, the use of the pronoun *Sie* (You) avoided by using the word *Du* (you) to improve interactivity rather than formal bureaucratic relationships.

In today's work environment, I deal with people on many levels. First, the lower level does not mean the bottom of the economy. Still, in the way of language, it is a common, everyday language, with everyday idioms that are sometimes not found in language lessons or typical German or even Bavarian. However, in making reports, I have to use Hoch *Deutsch* in speaking presentations, for example. Then reading supports the work, not just Hoch *Deutsch*, but *fachsbegriffe* (specific terminologies) in medicine. It means that, at the same time, I have to communicate medical terms in a language that is easy for colleagues and patients to understand. (IP08\_Munich\_Female)

In the English-speaking environment in Canberra, Indonesian workers encounter challenges speaking with locals. Even though Indonesians have been studying English since elementary education, using a foreign language as a daily language in the work environment and for everyday social interactions still presents challenges, especially in understanding the different dialects of local people (native speakers). Ms. ID, a staff at the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra who previously worked in Canada, said people in both countries, Australia and Canada, have the same structure and grammar of English. Still, they have different dialects, requiring adjustments in

understanding the meaning. Some mistakes in pronunciation can be fatal because it frequently causes miscommunication.

The problem is that it is more of an accent. The words or language are the same, but sometimes the pronunciation is different; everyone experiences it. When you first come to Australia, dealing with immigration is like, "what are you talking about?" [...] The accent is Canadian, they are more American, but they pronounce it like British people, they speak American, but the intonation is like British. The similarity with Australia is that the volume is significant for Americans, but Canadians are not that loud [...]. If it is accented, it is more of an accent; it is not a big problem. However, if we ask what it is and how many times we have to, for that purpose, it is like that. As for idioms, I often use American ones, and sometimes they do not even understand [...]. (IP03\_Canberra\_Female)

His colleague, Mr. AG, an IT staff said it took six months to understand the English Australian accent. Basic knowledge of English supports him in developing an understanding of Australian dialects.

In the beginning, it took much work to catch their accents. However, if we already have basic English, we are getting used to hearing it. If I am not mistaken, I have followed their conversation for about six months alone [...] I can only understand that, in the beginning, it was difficult, especially when we first came to Australia, it was difficult to understand their accent. (IP04\_Canberra\_Male)

Another colleague at the Indonesian Embassy, Mr. AM, agreed that accent is one of the challenging challenges to understanding Australian English. More interaction with local people will assist in interpreting accents or jargon that may not be found in formal English at school or in the English course.

Yes, for speaking experience, one of the difficulties is dealing with accents. Because Australian English seems to be dragged on, it takes about six months to catch what they mean when we interact. However, after six months, because we are used to some of

their jargon and slang, we can understand more; plus, our experience if we are at the guard post or meet counterparts from building contractors or something else is enough. It helps during the process of understanding Australian English. (IP06\_Canberra\_Male)

One of the essential points in developing language competence is the courage to speak. Lack of interaction with residents can continue to foster inferiority amongst Indonesian people who perceive Caucasians as a group that comes from developed countries, intellectual, prosperous, and more than Indonesians. Not all Westerners - Caucasians are as perceived because many works in the blue collars sector according to the classification of jobs in the community. Suppose there is a perception of inferiority among Indonesians and perform *malu* (shy). McCroskey and Richmond, quoted by (Kim, Zhao, & Diskin-Holdaway, 2022), argue that shyness is a substrate of unwillingness to communicate, arguing that speakers who are reticent or timid are less likely to engage in conversation. In that case, it will be difficult to develop language competence in everyday life, even though they will understand if they make mistakes in pronunciation or grammar because English or German is not the mother tongue of Indonesians. It is just that the way local people react to their language mispronunciation is different. For example Germans will ask questions ranging from asking formally, “Ich verstehe das nicht, können Sie Bitte wiederholen” (I don’t understand that, can you please repeat it again), or say, “Wie bitte, was hast du gesagt“ (sorry, what did you say?), or simply “Wie bitte” (I beg your pardon)?”.

Ms. ID recounts different experiences when speaking with Canadians and Australians.

Indeed, I feel fortunate in Canada because of the experience of interacting with Canadians; they are friendly people. Much nicer than Australians, and luckily, I met people who were not racist. So, when we speak English which they think is not clear, they understand that it is not their first language. That is what makes me applaud them [...] If in Australia, when they hear us talking not very fluently, they will say, “what do you mean,” the way is not

relaxed. If Canadians say directly, “oh, do you mean this?”. In Australia, “excuse me? I do not understand what you mean?” is the difference. (IP03\_Canberra\_Female)

Language is one of the main elements in learning about other cultures. Language can become an initial intercultural competence to develop other intercultural competencies. Lack of language competence often does not give Indonesians the confidence to interact intensively directly with residents. Thus, the existence of Indonesian communities sometimes becomes an escape to provide a sense of social security because of the limited language competence. Language competence can be an early determinant of success or even a disaster in interacting with local people. Language competence is part of intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, it shall put language at the heart of intercultural abilities.

Nonetheless, it is frequently left out of most models and unstated by most intercultural scholars (Fantini, 2020). In addition, the greater competence of communication, the greater the quality of relationships, and the greater quality of relationships, the greater the quality of life (Spitzberg B., 2013). Moreover, an individual global worker can better understand self and foreign counterparts and use the results to improve their intercultural communication skills. The individual is better equipped to become more effective by reducing anxiety and stress stemming from intercultural collaboration (Messner, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Participants have different experiences of implementing their communication competence in intercultural interaction. There is also no specific pre-departure intercultural training to improve their cultural awareness of the host cities. Participants learn automatically from their experiences through engagement in formal or informal interactions with local people in the workplace or community. As sojourners came from multicultural societies in Indonesia, some participants contend it provides advantages to adjusting to a new environment. Indeed, most

experienced participants take time to adapt to the host cultures. Therefore, a case studies simulation of a destination country in the pre-departure intercultural training is essential, particularly for sojourners who have yet to experience studying or working abroad. Less competence in intercultural sensitivity to local customs and historical issues potentially invites open conflict with the people in the host cities.

Language competence is the main prerequisite for living in a foreign country. In addition to the requirements for a residence visa, continuing studies, daily communication tools, and other conditions, knowledge and understanding of the language also show respect for local culture and facilitate acceptance from residents. Regional accents and jargon are often challenging for Indonesians to understand in conversations with local people, so it takes time to learn them. Courage in conversations without fear of being judged on grammatical structure, word choice, pronunciation, and others is essential for developing language competence in everyday life. Communication competence is fundamental to improving the quality of relationships because communication constitutes relationships.

Due to preliminary research, our study has limitations, especially for the research subjects. There is still limited coverage regarding the research's participants and numbers, so it needs to provide a comprehensive picture of the intercultural communication competence of Indonesian workers in general. Some of the findings in the study can serve as the basis for further research development, either through qualitative or quantitative approaches or a combination of both methods, to provide a representative situation through more exhaustive sampling and more exploratory qualitative analysis.

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