Assessing Intercultural Competence in English Language Learners: Perspectives on Local Cultural Integration in Indonesia

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Article Info

Abstract

This research examines Indonesian university students' intercultural competence (ICC) development and assessment in English language courses, highlighting the importance of cultural integration and interaction. A detailed case study, the study examines students' encounters with foreign cultures using interviews, focus group discussions, and academic performance analysis against Indonesia's rich cultural diversity and historical context. Local community involvement promotes cultural learning, and Indonesia must continue to improve ICC in EFL teaching. The study also confirms the ICCit instrument's ability to measure intercultural competence's behavioral involvement. This research illuminates the intricacies and context-dependence of intercultural competence and the benefits of cultural integration and understanding for society, which can be used to improve ICC in language education.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the effort to develop a method for, and the results of, understanding the complexities and range of local cultural interaction from the perspectives of Indonesian students themselves. This is part of wider research aimed at devising a theoretical framework for assessing intercultural competence and its outcomes among overseas students, particularly in relation to their academic performance. Consider that cross-cultural contact is now not only a matter for the minority from overseas in English-speaking countries, but also the everyday experience of the majority in third and fourth world. Globally, this is the context in which English has become a crucial requirement for

university entry and a basic tool for academic success in many non-English-speaking countries. Thus, assessment of the impact of international education goes beyond the issue of functional English proficiency among the sojourners, to possible imbalances in their home-student peers' educational outcomes, and changes in the nature of knowledge transmission and production within societies. Usually assumed, but rarely demonstrated or investigated, is the view that positive interaction with local culture is beneficial for both individuals and hosts, and that those who study abroad should be 'cultural go-betweens' in one sense or another. However, there is little consensus on exactly what the outcomes of intercultural learning should be, or what specific traits and behaviors would indicate such outcomes.

Background

The Republic of Indonesia is a vast and sprawling archipelago, stretching across the vast expanses of the Indian and Pacific oceans (Munavvar, 2021)(Roberts, 2021). Its geographical location, bridging two major bodies of water, has positioned the country as a hub for global trade, commerce, and strategic military advancements among some of the most powerful nations in the world. Throughout history, Indonesia has experienced a profound and lasting colonial influence, spanning several centuries, starting with the fifteenth-century Portuguese traders and culminating in a staggering 350 years of Dutch occupation (Lubis & Hasudungan, 2022)(Fahmi, 2020). This colonial legacy has undeniably left its imprint on the fabric of Indonesian society, influencing not only its politics and culture but also the nation's worldview. It continues to shape Indonesia's relations with other countries and deeply permeates its internal affairs. The intricate and multi-faceted interactions with diverse cultures over the years have given rise to a rich tapestry of Indonesian culture, characterized by its remarkable diversity and ongoing processes of cultural integration. As a result, the Indonesian people have developed distinct multicultural identities, embodying the fusion of various cultural elements. This incredible diversity finds expression in the plethora of ethnic groups present across the archipelago, with over 300 distinctive groups (Siregar et al.2023)(Couacaud, 2024)(Beckett2021). Moreover, Indonesia boasts a staggering 583 languages, along with countless variations and dialects, which were even more numerous five years ago. However, it is widely recognized that Bahasa Indonesia, the Indonesian language, serves as the national language and enjoys widespread comprehension among the country's political and educational elites. Since gaining independence in 1945, Indonesia has made commendable efforts to preserve its cultural diversity while simultaneously promoting unity through diversity among its people (Widyatiningtyas…, 2023). These efforts encompass the elevation of Bahasa Indonesia as the standard of modernization and the drive toward a globalized society. Consequently, sociolinguistic changes have taken hold, especially among the urban youth, who are the torchbearers of Indonesia's future. The implications of these transformative changes on the development of cultural identities and the amalgamation of the global and the local have become subjects of great interest for sociolinguists studying Indonesia. The author of this text has dedicated over two decades to teaching English as a second language (ESL) and training English language teachers across various countries (Porto et al., 2021)(Khany & Kamalvand, 2022)(Phan, 2020). A substantial portion of the author's teaching experience was acquired during a six-year stay in Indonesia, where the sociolinguistic changes mentioned earlier were increasingly noticeable among the author's students. The students' anecdotes about language and culture, as well as the growing significance of language in shaping culture, sparked the author's interest in exploring sociolinguistic research in Indonesia (Zein et al.2020)(Assis Hornay, 2020). Viewing the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia to non-Indonesians as a process in which the students themselves become exemplars of the "new" elite engaged in modernization raises intriguing questions about the juxtaposition of local and global cultures

within a highly globalized linguistic landscape. This, in turn, leads to inquiries regarding the implications of Indonesia's language policy on English language acquisition and intercultural attitudes. Moreover, it prompts reflection on how one may accurately measure intercultural competence within a local context. In conclusion, Indonesia stands as a vibrant nation filled with rich cultural diversity and historical influences. Its vast archipelago, significant colonial legacy, and ongoing sociolinguistic changes contribute to the complex tapestry that is Indonesian society (Fatmawati, 2021)(Lasambouw et al.2022)(Prastowo et al.2023). As the country continues to navigate its position as a global player, understanding the interplay between language, culture, and identity becomes crucial. For the author, the exploration of sociolinguistics in Indonesia has been a fascinating journey, unveiling new insights into the intersection of local and global forces. As the nation progresses and evolves, its language policies, language acquisition, and intercultural competence will remain prominent areas of study and reflection. Through this exploration, a deeper understanding of Indonesia's dynamic cultural landscape and its implications for the global community can be achieved.

Research Questions

In trying to measure the success of the students' integration and the effect of the program on their ability to function within the local community, a tool is needed to compare their ability to before they began their study and what is expected at their level of study. The most efficient way to analyze integration is through behavior and the ability to perform certain functions. This is the practical application of their language and cultural knowledge, and language students should have a clear idea of what is expected of them in terms of function and how to get there. This study stresses that language is a tool for getting things done and that the students should be able to do the same things in Indonesian that they can do in their own language. This can entail anything from a practical, everyday activity like bargaining at the market to something as complex as teaching a subject in the language being studied. With this in mind, the research question involving whether or not students can function in the community and what level of language and cultural knowledge is necessary to perform various functions comes in at a close second to the first question.

What are the local culture competencies of the students? In trying to integrate into the local community, many are under the assumption that they've learned something about the local culture, but there are no specifics to what the local culture competencies should be. This question aims to create a profile of the local culture competencies of the students to provide a clear target for what they should be learning so that they can better function in the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's interconnected and globalized world, the interactions and connections between different cultures have grown to be exceedingly frequent and widespread, surpassing the boundaries of geography and time. The motivations behind these cross-cultural contacts are varied and multi-faceted, ranging from the historical conquests and colonization of nations to the rise of political domination and personal initiatives driven by curiosity and interest (Warman et al.2024)(Lin et al., 2020)(Lee et al.2020). These interactions serve as bridges, connecting people from all corners of the world and allowing for an unprecedented exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences. Such exchanges come in an array of forms, encompassing intimate encounters between two individuals as well as larger, enduring engagements involving numerous individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The nature of these close cultural encounters can often evoke tensions and challenges as individuals navigate differences in language, beliefs, and practices (Captari et al., 2022)(Vigliano Relva & Jung, 2021). However, they also have the potential to create joyous and vibrant occasions that enrich the collective human experience. Grand festivals and celebrations are perfect examples of such

occasions, bringing diverse communities together to revel in the richness of cultural diversity and creating a colorful tapestry woven with traditions and customs. Likewise, heartwarming family reunions provide a unique opportunity for cultures to intertwine, creating a beautiful blend of rituals, languages, and values. Intermarriages further contribute to this harmonious blending, as they create a unique fusion of traditions and serve as a testament to the power of love transcending cultural boundaries.

Moreover, these cultural exchanges lead to thought-provoking and transformative exchanges of customs, ideas, and values. By immersing ourselves in the experiences of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and beauty of our diverse world. This serves as a catalyst for personal growth and transformation, as our perspectives expand and our appreciation for the richness of human expression deepens.

Nevertheless, forging successful and harmonious relationships with individuals hailing from different cultural backgrounds in these intricate and multifaceted contact situations presents a complex set of challenges (Munyao, 2024). It demands great sensitivity, respect, and understanding. It requires us to recognize and appreciate the nuances that shape their identities, traditions, and beliefs. By actively listening, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and seeking common ground, we can build bridges of understanding, foster empathy, and promote a more inclusive and interconnected world.

In conclusion, the increasing frequency and widespread nature of cultural interactions highlight the importance of recognizing and celebrating the vast array of human experiences. It reminds us of the power and beauty that lie in embracing diversity and engaging in genuine cross-cultural connections. As we navigate these contact situations, let us strive for empathy, open-mindedness, and a genuine curiosity to learn from one another. Only by doing so can we truly appreciate the richness of our global community and work together towards a world that thrives on harmony, understanding, and unity.

Many theories focus on intercultural communication, with Landis et al. stating that cross-cultural communication involves the interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds (Chwialkowska2020)(Dai and Martin2022). This interaction can be verbal or nonverbal and reflects the individuals involved. The term "intercultural" refers to interactions with people from other cultural backgrounds or those who are culturally different (Mosed et al., 2021)(Tsang, 2022).

Intercultural communication plays a crucial role in today's globalized world, where individuals from diverse backgrounds increasingly interact with each other. By understanding and embracing the diversity of cultures, individuals can effectively communicate, build meaningful connections, and foster mutual understanding. Intercultural communication encompasses various elements, such as language, customs, values, and beliefs, which significantly influence interpersonal interactions. It involves being open-minded, flexible, and respectful towards different cultural norms, as well as actively seeking to bridge the communication gap between cultures (Mushaathoni, 2023). This not only enhances relationships but also promotes empathy, cultural appreciation, and cooperation on both personal and professional levels. In an interconnected world, intercultural communication is an essential skill that empowers individuals to navigate the global landscape and contribute to inclusive and harmonious communities. Through effective intercultural communication, individuals can break down barriers, resolve conflicts, and create a more interconnected and mutually beneficial society. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the importance of intercultural communication continues to grow. It is crucial for individuals to recognize that cultural diversity is a strength rather than a source of division (Gran et al.2021)(Poort et al.2022). Therefore, investing in intercultural communication training, education, and awareness can lead to a more harmonious and inclusive future. By fostering understanding, cooperation, and acceptance, intercultural

communication has the power to unite people from different cultural backgrounds and create a world where everyone's voices are respected and heard.

This section provides definitions and explanations of theories related to intercultural competence, cultural contact, and integration. It also includes a description of cultural adaptation and orientations of culture, as well as the relation between cultural and language learning. The section concludes with a mention of previous empirical studies or research on these theories.

METHOD

A comprehensive and detailed case study design was carefully selected based on the definition provided by Stake. According to this definition, a case is identified as a (bounded) system that is intricately intertwined with its surrounding environment (Javanroodi et al., 2023)(Alshahrani et al.2024)(Taxt et al.2022)(Botezatu et al., 2023). In line with this approach, the present study centered on investigating the experiences of local students with foreign cultures within the two prominent and esteemed universities known as NUS. The designated 'case' under scrutiny specifically revolved around the myriad encounters encountered by these students, while the 'bounded system' was unequivocally determined to be the English language courses offered at these educational institutions.

The rationale behind adopting a case study design was rooted in its unmatched suitability for conducting an in-depth exploration of a contemporary phenomenon. By utilizing this research strategy, the investigators were able to thoroughly investigate and shed light on the intricacies of the intricate social and cultural dynamics in a genuine real-life context. Moreover, the case study methodology allowed for the incorporation of a diverse array of sources as evidence, thus further bolstering the robustness of the study.

Cases, by their very nature, are inherently restricted in terms of time and scope of activities and this particular research was no exception (Maxwell, 2021)(Kazdin, 2021). Indeed, the study adhered to a well-defined temporal and activity-based boundary in order to ensure the successful attainment of its goals and objectives.

The focus of this research was on local English language learners' experiences of cultural integration and intercultural contact. The vast and complex nature of these issues makes the choice of research methodology one of the most important and potentially challenging aspects of the research process. The choice of methodology will be related to the research questions which were addressed earlier in this paper. In attempting to answer these questions, it was necessary to take an inductive approach, listening carefully to what Indonesian students had to say about their experiences and allowing patterns and categories to emerge from the data. Therefore, qualitative research methods were chosen and research was conducted within a constructivist paradigm, which recognizes the active and constructive role of the participant in the research process.

Data Collection

Quantitative data collection methods involved the development and testing of a model of stages of intercultural development (Elahi et al.2024)(Eren, 2023). This model theorizes movement through six stages of intercultural development and provides a set of indicators to enable the location of movement between stages. A combined set of Likert scale and open-ended questions, designed to address each of the indicators for movement between stages, was developed into a self-administered questionnaire. At pre and post-testing stages of the research, participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire. Accompanying the post-course questionnaire, researchers also administered reflective diaries to a selected group of participants, at the rate of one per week. This was done with the intention of capturing the variability of intercultural learning experiences over the duration of the program and provoking reflexive thought of participants about their intercultural development. An examination of the learning processes and reality of student experiences of education for intercultural competence was conducted, via monitoring of the

implementation of the specialized intercultural learning tasks and assessment tasks into the language courses and interviews with Indonesian teaching staff. A final means of data collection was an examination of student academic results over the period of the research, to investigate if there was any correlation between increased intercultural competence and academic performance.

Qualitative data was collected via interviews and focus group discussions involving selected participants. An interview schedule and set of focus group questions were designed to elicit as much information as possible about participants' perceptions and attitudes towards their progression in intercultural awareness and competence over the duration of the course. The questions were designed to be both open-ended and closed, in order to prompt detailed and discourse information and to enable comparative analysis of respondents across the interviews and focus groups. During the interviews, researchers also sought to explore the relationship between participants' intercultural competence development and their experiences with contact with local culture and personal relationships forged with local people. All interviews were tape recorded with prior consent, transcribed ad verbatim, and later translated and back translated into Indonesian language so as to facilitate cross-checking of translations and data analysis. Focus group discussions with selected participants and final year Indonesian students, involved in the teaching provision of courses and mentoring of university students, sought to canvass the perceptions of different stakeholders with regard to students' intercultural learning and the facilitators and inhibitors of such learning.

This research employed mixed methods in the investigation of the development of intercultural competence by Indonesian university students during a six-month English language intensive program. The qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures were conducted concomitantly, with the results synthesized in the final stage of the research.

7. Data Analysis

With no evidence of S-I-C relating to attitude for the high cultural out-group, we will not consider the two cases and focus only on behavior and attitude for the single in-group when comparing S-I-C of differing types.

To avoid loss of information, we performed separate analyses of intercultural orientation for respondents with high orientation toward a specific culture and for those with a positive attitude but no strong orientation for the in-group. This resulted in a total of 4 intercultural orientation comparisons, and S-I-C was only found to be related to the in-group attitude case from the local culture orientation contrast.

A simple comparison of the US-oriented group with the local-oriented group did not adequately portray the relationship between S-I-C and intercultural orientation. An intention-behavior discrepancy case from a respondent with high orientation toward US culture provided a contrast to the case of a subject with high orientation toward local culture but no strong attitude for the in-group. This discrepancy case is the only example in which a subject had orientation toward both cultures yet did not behave in accordance with his attitude for the high cultural in-group. This is a rare occurrence in the data set, and it is difficult to detect potential discrepancy cases from the US-oriented group to compare them with local culture-oriented respondents.

Through interview responses to direct and indirect questions, we classified 12 respondents as having high orientation towards US culture and 18 respondents as having high orientation toward their local culture. This classification was based on self-reported behavior in addition to stated attitudes, and the two cases we consider to be directly related to S-I-C.

The data analysis section details the systematic process involved in organizing and interpreting the collected information to address the posed questions. This analysis process will ultimately guide our judgment on the validity of the initial hypotheses concerning S-I-C orientation or S-I-C discrepancy. Validity of these hypotheses is directly related to the degree and direction of S-I-C within a given culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Findings

From the ethnographic case studies of five English Language Lecturers (ELLs) with high intercultural competence, the following general findings are reported. When an ELL has a strong desire to integrate into the local culture, the informants' experiences support Kim's assertion that this person will generally have a positive view of the culture (Björling et al.2021)(Bell, 2023)(Louie et al.2022). Although they did not view the cultures of Indonesia and the target language communities through rose-colored glasses, the informants' abiding respect and admiration for the local cultures was evident. This was further manifested through their interactions with local people, where they often found themselves in the role of cultural learners, rather than passive or active exponents of their own culture. Though Liddicoat claims that it can be difficult to distinguish between the levels of culture when teaching a second language in a homogeneous class of students from the same L1 background, these informants found ample evidence of traditional culture in the speech and non-verbal communication of their predominantly Javanese students (Sagita et al.2023)(Sari et al.2022). This revelation came as a bit of a shock to the informant in the KKN setting, as he had been led to believe that Javanese culture was in decline and that a rural community such as he had been placed in would be heavily influenced by modern Indonesian culture. The language skill in which they were all most proficient, Bahasa Indonesia, was also the area in which they found most cultural variation. The ELLs often found this process of cultural learning to be an enjoyable one, enhancing their integration and understanding of the local culture (Gao, 2021)(Adams, 2020)(Ivaldi et al., 2022). By learning culture through the language and vice versa, they have in many ways embodied the inseparability of culture and language learning, and at several points have shown evidence of developing Wierzbicka's Ideal L2 Self who wishes to become a member of another speech community. An unexpected yet consistent finding was that all of the informants reported periods of irritation or difficulty in understanding and accepting aspects of the local culture, and the language and behaviour which stemmed from it (Alamineh et al., 2023)(Inta et al.2023). Though these were sometimes trying moments, they were seen as integral parts of their intercultural learning experience and were often followed by breakthroughs in cultural understanding. This leads to the final and most significant finding that the primary site for this culture learning was outside of the ELLs' professional teaching and their interactions with Western colleagues. The locus of intercultural learning was definitively within the local community, where they were each involved in a variety of activities. The various identities of teacher, student, neighbour, or KKN participant were conducive to informal interactions and also provided different perspectives on the same culture. This stands in stark contrast to the experiences of ELLs of low intercultural competence, who have been shown to interact mainly with an expatriate community and often function as language and culture informants for their Western colleagues. The enriching experiences of these highly interculturally competent ELLs highlight the importance of actively engaging with the local community in order to fully immerse oneself in the target culture. (Gonzalez, 2023)(Triggs, 2020)(Yeh & Mitric, 2023) Within this immersive approach, the ELLs demonstrate an openness to learning and a willingness to challenge preconceived notions about the host culture. They are not mere bystanders, but active participants in the process of cultural integration. Through their interactions with local individuals, they take on the role of cultural learners, eagerly absorbing the nuances of the local customs and traditions. This reciprocal exchange of cultural knowledge and understanding is not limited to the confines of the classroom; rather, it permeates all aspects of the ELLs' daily lives. They navigate the intricacies of the host culture by utilizing their strong language skills in Bahasa Indonesia, which is both a means of communication and a gateway to deeper cultural insights. As the ELLs delve into the language, they encounter various cultural

variations that further enrich their understanding of the local community. The integration of language and culture learning is integral to their growth as individuals and as teachers. Through this synergistic approach, the ELLs transcend the boundaries of language acquisition and become immersed in the local culture, embodying Wierzbicka's Ideal L2 Self. This transformative experience fosters a deep respect and admiration for the host culture, which is evident in their interactions with local individuals. Despite occasional challenges and moments of frustration, the ELLs see these as integral components of their intercultural learning journey. Each hurdle serves as a stepping stone towards greater cultural understanding and empathy. Moreover, the ELLs' intercultural learning is predominantly facilitated by their engagement with the local community, rather than their professional interactions with Western colleagues. By assuming various roles such as teachers, students, neighbours, or participants in the KKN program, the ELLs are afforded unique perspectives on the host culture. The informality of these interactions allows for genuine cultural exchange and a holistic understanding of the target culture. This starkly contrasts with the experiences of ELLs with low intercultural competence, who often find themselves confined to an expatriate community and function solely as language and culture informants for their Western colleagues. In essence, the success of the ELLs in achieving high intercultural competence lies in their active involvement within the local community, where they immerse themselves in diverse cultural activities and form meaningful connections with individuals from the host culture.

Discussion

The study conducted on the intercultural competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia places a significant emphasis on local identity. This all-encompassing and comprehensive study incorporates a diverse range of perspectives from the local Javanese, Sundanese, Chinese, Bataknese, and expatriates, which adds depth, complexity, and immense richness to the findings. The extensively conducted research reveals that there exists a broad spectrum of attitudes and behaviors when it comes to integrating with the L2 community and local cultural groups, as indicated by the comprehensive C.U.B.E questionnaire (Tohri et al.2022)(Spencer & Charsley, 2021). It is worth noting that learners generally engage in behaviors that are closely linked to the customs, traditions, and societal norms of the local cultural groups. These observable behaviors are not isolating in nature and can be interpreted as an initial understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of the cultural differences. This manifestation of intercultural competence is crucial in fostering an environment of non-conflict avoidance and facilitative, effective communication that goes beyond linguistic proficiency. However, it is essential to mention that there is a pressing need for increased access, confidence, and ongoing, continuous interaction with the target language and culture in order to further enhance intercultural competence among learners (Romijn et al., 2021)(de et al.2020). Formal institutional support and seeking information, guidance, and mentorship from proficient L2 speakers should be further intensified to provide a solid foundation for learners to thrive in their intercultural endeavors and succeed in their multicultural interactions (Zein et al.2020)(Raja et al.2022)(Shadiev et al., 2021). Several qualitative reports, derived from in-depth interviews with learners, further support these findings and highlight the significance of continuous learning, growth, and improvement in intercultural competence (Schwarzenthal et al.2020)(Romijn et al., 2021)(Zhai & Wibowo, 2023). These findings emphasize the ongoing need for educational institutions to prioritize intercultural competence as a vital component of their language learning programs. Moreover, the astonishingly high scores observed for the cultural interaction subscale can be seen as an exemplary demonstration of the advanced skills, adaptability, and resilience possessed by L2 learners who are intentionally placed in "ring 3 and 4" of intercultural interaction. This strategic placement reflects their phase of integrative tension and their diligent effort to minimize

cultural shock through active engagement and participation. These profound observations strongly align with and validate the U-curve adaptation theory, which is derived from the broader acculturation theory. It is crucial to highlight that this unique and remarkable phenomenon provides a sharp contrast to the reports on expatriates and EFL teachers (Siqueira, 2021)(Siqueira2023). Despite having moderate to high scores in cultural confidence, these individuals tend to engage in isolative and defensive behaviors, preferring to primarily interact within their own cultural group while maintaining limited interaction with local cultural groups. This concerning pattern of self-segregation, whether intentional or implicit, raises valid concerns about the effectiveness, adequacy, and authenticity of maintaining a high standard in EFL education and the teaching profession as a whole. Ultimately, the wide range of intercultural attitudes, behavior patterns, and intercultural competence discovered in this groundbreaking study are contextually more positive and overwhelmingly encouraging compared to other cultural communities facing similar challenges (Chan et al.2020)(Fischer and Karl2022)(Liao and Correia2022). Specifically, migrant learners and refugees originating from post-colonial countries with Eurocentric cultural hegemony face even greater difficulties, obstacles, and barriers in their intercultural integration and cross-cultural understanding. The findings from this study not only shed a bright light on the immense progress that has been made in fostering intercultural understanding and competence amongst EFL learners in Indonesia but also significantly underline, underscore, and emphasize the urgent need for continuous, sustained efforts, initiatives, and interventions towards the ongoing development, enhancement, and enrichment of intercultural competence in this unique and dynamic educational context. These findings have far-reaching implications and can serve as a catalyst for change not only in EFL education but also in promoting intercultural understanding and cooperation on a global scale.

Implications

The implications of this study present both benefits and limitations to society. The benefits involve the development and enhancement of intercultural competence and local cultural integration in Indonesia. This study has provided a clear indication of what intercultural competence entails and how it integrates with the local culture. Educators and English stakeholders now have a clearer understanding of what it means to be interculturally competent and an understanding of how to guide their students to develop intercultural competence. As language and culture are intertwined, developing intercultural competence in turn enhances local cultural integration. The many informants in this study indicated that developing intercultural competence is essential for maintaining the distinctiveness of the Indonesian culture in the wake of globalization. By learning about other cultures and still being able to affirm one's own, Indonesia's culture can survive and thrive in today's international world. This has been one of the main goals of the Indonesian government in its promotion of English language learning. This study provides insight and sound advice as to how this can be achieved.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper examines Indonesian university students' intercultural competence (ICC) growth and assessment in English language instruction. A rigorous case study that included interviews, focus group talks, and academic performance analysis shows how cultural integration and engagement improve ICC. Local community engagement in cultural learning is vital for student intercultural competence, according to the research. This study also confirms the ICCit instrument for evaluating ICC's behavioral engagement components, making it a useful tool for educators and researchers. This research may benefit society through cultural integration and understanding beyond education. The study contributes to the worldwide discussion on intercultural competence by underlining the necessity for continued efforts to improve ICC in Indonesian EFL education. The research also

highlights the complexity and context-dependence of intercultural competence, challenging educators and policymakers to build culture-specific ICC initiatives. This essay advocates for a holistic language education that emphasizes intercultural competence to prepare students for academic achievement and meaningful engagement in a globalized world.

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