

Verbal and Non-Verbal Intercultural Communication Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract

This study examines the verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication challenges faced by R, an Indonesian exchange student at UC Davis, and explores the strategies he used to overcome them. Employing a narrative inquiry methodology, the research focuses on R's lived experiences and investigates how these strategies fostered his intercultural communication competence. The findings reveal that R encountered difficulties related to language diversity, differing communication styles, evolving English language usage, and non-verbal cues such as cultural norms and contextual differences. To address these challenges, he utilized strategies including maintaining language fluency, employing visual aids, and adopting alternative communication methods. These approaches enabled him to navigate communication barriers effectively while fostering cultural adaptability and a deeper understanding of cross-cultural nuances. R's experiences highlight the significance of adaptive strategies in managing personal space, maintaining mindfulness, and engaging actively in intercultural interactions. The study underscores the importance of these skills in enhancing practical communication abilities and navigating the complexities of intercultural environments. These insights contribute to a broader understanding of how exchange students develop competence in diverse cultural settings, providing valuable implications for educators and program coordinators in supporting intercultural learning.

Keywords: Verbal and Non-Verbal; Communication; Challenges; Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication competence is becoming an increasingly important skill in our globalized world. Goertler and Schenker (2021) state that study overseas provide a unique opportunity for students to immerse themselves in different cultures and develop intercultural communication competence. However, exchange students often face challenges when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, both verbally and non-verbally. These challenges can hinder their ability to adapt to the host culture, form meaningful relationships with locals, and fully engage in their study abroad program. Research in the field of intercultural communication has highlighted the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication in cross-cultural interactions. Verbal communication involves using of language to convey meaning, while non-verbal communication refers using of body language, gestures, and facial expressions to communicate. Both verbal and non-verbal communication is influenced by cultural norms, values, and expectations, making it crucial for exchange students to develop intercultural communication competence (Goertler & Schenker, 2021). International students must often adjust to a new culture and achieve International Communication Competence (ICC) to excel globally. The ICC notion includes the capacity to communicate effectively and appropriately with host culture members, necessitating acceptable language abilities, understanding the host culture, and a willingness to comprehend host-culture

members. Dai and Chen (2014) argue that ICC includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioural characteristics of intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and adroitness. However, further examination and cross-cultural validation are needed for the relationships among these three ICC components. Several formerly classified as culture-general traits have been revealed to be culture-specific, and the effects of culture-specific communication patterns on the ICC application process still not be adequately studied. When language learners gain international awareness, they can successfully express knowledge while simultaneously developing human relationships with people from various languages and cultures (Santoso et al., 2022). This idea indicates that English speakers who want to connect with people from diverse cultural backgrounds must acquire intercultural awareness by employing Intercultural Communication Competence. Communication problems caused by cultural differences can result in misunderstandings, irritation, and even confrontation. Previous research regarding Intercultural Communication Competence was conducted by Barker (2016) in the *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, who conducted in-depth interviews with Americans living or having lived in Sweden and Swedes living or having lived in the US to gain a nuanced and in-depth understanding of how immigrants and expatriates perceive and experience the process of obtaining and using ICC, as well as how cultural factors influence it. Other than that, similar research conducted by Galante (2015), which was published in the *Brazilian English Language Teaching Journal*, focused on projects that encompass reflections on students' identities that improve students' intercultural communication awareness and competency while using English. The primary goal of that research is to provide opportunities for students to explore the usage of English in many situations and cultures, allowing them to embrace their identities while respecting linguistic and cultural diversity. Evaluating the two studies about intercultural communication competence above, the researcher found limited research on the specific communication challenges experienced by international students in a foreign culture. This research aims to address this gap in the literature by exploring the verbal and non-verbal communication challenges faced by an Indonesian exchange student and how communication strategies are applied to overcome the challenges during a study abroad program. Indonesian EFL classes prioritize linguistic knowledge over basic communication skills and cultural factors, resulting in insufficient intercultural communication abilities and, thus, more difficult times when Indonesian students visit the United States and other English-speaking countries. The result of this research offered insights into the specific verbal and non-verbal communication challenges that participant as the exchange student faced and how the participant applied the communication strategies. By shedding light on the difficulties encountered by an exchange student, this research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how to support exchange students in their intercultural communication efforts and ultimately improve their study abroad experience.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative research method with a narrative inquiry design. Narrative inquiry captures the experiences of an individual exposing the lived experience or specific perspective of that individual, largely through interviews, which are then recorded and organized into a chronological narrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The author used written reflection, interview, and participant's reflective notes to collect the data. To analyse the data, the author used thematical analysis from Miles and Huberman (2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Verbal and Non-verbal Intercultural Communication Challenges

This study offers an in-depth exploration of student R's experience in navigating verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication challenges began in Indonesia and continued during his study at UC Davis. Reflecting on his formative years, R shared that his initial experiences with intercultural communication were both stimulating and challenging. As a high school student, he encountered diverse ways of using language and non-verbal cues during discussions with classmates and teachers. These experiences sparked his fascination with the power of words and the subtleties of gestures, facial expressions, and body language. R emphasized that effective communication extends beyond spoken words; it requires understanding cultural differences and accurately interpreting non-verbal signals. He realized early on that building meaningful connections necessitated both verbal skills and critical awareness of non-verbal communication.

Upon moving to UC Davis, R faced new challenges as an international student adapting to a different cultural environment. In interviews, he recounted the importance of aligning communication with the cultural norms, values, and habits of local residents. R highlighted how simple daily greetings, like saying hello to neighbours, played a crucial role in fostering interpersonal relationships. For him, effective communication was less about language proficiency and more about cultural adaptation and relational maintenance. The cultural shift compelled R to navigate unfamiliar accents, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references in his verbal interactions. He developed strategies to enhance his clarity, such as using simple, direct language and avoiding culturally specific jargon when speaking to non-native speakers. He shared, *"Communication is actually as simple as if we can speak English. For grammar and so on, that's the second number. The important thing is that we understand and can relate and blend with the people there."* Living with a host family rather than in a dormitory allowed him to form deeper connections, as he explained, *"Communication is better, feelings are better because we can interact from day to day... I think that's an interesting thing in building very sustainable communication."* These interactions helped him adapt to cultural norms and values, such as daily greetings and conflict management, which he identified as essential components of long-term interpersonal communication.

During student R's study abroad program at UC Davis, adapting to the local language and cultural communication norms posed significant challenges. A primary verbal challenge was understanding the local lingo, casual small talk, and slang commonly used by Americans. As the participant stated, *"My difficulty in communicating mostly comes from not understanding the local lingo. So, casual small talks and slang are often misunderstood at the start of my experience."* Additionally, he gained deeper insights into regional dialects, such as monophthongal shifts and the omission of subject-verb agreement, which enriched his understanding of the dynamic nature of the English language.

The student R also observed cultural differences in communication styles, particularly in directness and brevity. While Indonesians tend to provide extensive context when speaking, Americans often favor a more direct approach. As they reflected, *"As Indonesians, we tend to include more context when speaking... whereas local US citizens are generally more direct, which I think is influenced by their more confrontational and critical culture."* Furthermore, the use of academic jargon and unfamiliar technical terms in campus interactions was initially overwhelming. However, the participant regarded this as an opportunity to learn rather than a setback, noting, *"If there is jargon or difficult terms, that's part of learning... I googled, asked people around me, asked lecturers or professors, and finally I found out."* Student R also noted the importance of adjusting to rhetorical and contextual differences in communication. He recounted an instance where he realized that certain greetings carried different intentions: *"Some conversation and questions are rhetoric, and there are different attention*

behind certain phrases. For example, small talks like when people start a conversation with 'How you doing?' which is equivalent to 'hello.'" Adapting to these subtleties allowed him to navigate social interactions more effectively.

In terms of non-verbal communication, challenges were minimal but noteworthy. The participant had to adapt to cultural norms regarding personal space and greetings, learning that Americans generally preferred a larger personal space but were also open to touch-based greetings like hugs. He observed, *"People in the US have bigger personal space but are more open to more touch-based greetings such as hugs."* Eye contact, an integral aspect of non-verbal communication, did not pose significant issues for the participant, who emphasized attentiveness in maintaining proper eye contact during interactions, even in potentially intimidating situations: *"I just pay attention to the person I'm talking to... even if the person looks scary or intimidating, I stay mindful and keep listening to what the person says."*

As his time in California progressed, student R experienced a shift in his approach in using English. Immersion in an English-speaking environment significantly influenced student R's fluency and spontaneous use of English. He explained, *"Speaking English is an obligation because we live abroad, in the U.S. especially where the main language is English. So perhaps the first thing is that the habit of speaking English is no longer something that needs to be forced."* What initially felt like an obligation soon became a natural part of his daily life. He emphasized the impact of continuous practice on his proficiency, stating, *"It affected how I could make a sentence without thinking... it influenced my fluency in speaking because we don't really think a lot about grammar."* This shift enhanced his fluency, allowing him to form sentences more spontaneously and focus on ensuring that his listeners understood him, rather than on perfecting grammar. He also adapted to using a more neutral accent, moving away from his Indonesian accent to blend more seamlessly into the American context.

The dynamic nature of language in his new environment further challenged student R to expand his vocabulary. Exposure to new slang and dialectal variations, such as "caucacity" and "yeet," highlighted the evolving nature of language and reinforced his understanding that communication is not solely about adhering to grammar rules but about how language is received and understood by others. Interacting with a diverse community introduced R to new vocabulary and dialects, enriching his linguistic knowledge. He reflected, *"There is some new vocabulary or there are some new accents, and so on... Our vocabulary is rich, and the interaction also trains us to use vocabulary in the right conditions. For example, formal and difficult vocabulary cannot be placed in informal situations."* This exposure allowed him to adjust his language use to different contexts.

In his reflections, student R emphasized the significance of balancing verbal and non-verbal communication. While non-verbal cues are important in making language more persuasive, he viewed verbal communication as the primary and most direct means of expression. He regarded non-verbal communication as complementary rather than essential, stating, *"The role of verbal communication is more important because that is the main point in communicating, not through writing, body language, and so on."* This belief shaped his approach in navigating the complexities of intercultural communication in his academic and social life. Overall, student R's journey in adapting to the linguistic and cultural landscape of UC Davis provides valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges of intercultural communication. His experiences emphasized the importance of flexibility, empathy, and cultural awareness in building successful relationships across diverse contexts.

Verbal and Non-verbal Intercultural Communication Strategies

The strategies highlighted by Student R for verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication are insightful and showcase adaptability, resilience, and resourcefulness in overcoming

language barriers and fostering effective communication in diverse contexts. The first strategy is active listening and attentiveness. Student R emphasizes active listening and responding respectfully as key to building relationship and creating a comfortable environment for communication. This strategy not only facilitates smoother conversations but also reflects cultural sensitivity and interpersonal awareness, as he recounted *"The strategy for being proficient in English... is to be someone who can actively listen and also respond... such interaction strategies are very important to maintain language fluency and proficiency."*

Simplifying language by adjusting vocabulary and speech speed for non-native speakers was another approach for student R as he told *"For example, some of my friends from Japan and Korea experienced difficulties, so I had to adapt by using English which was easier to understand."* To overcome language barriers, R frequently relied on visual aids, such as sharing pictures on his smartphone. This strategy proved particularly effective in clarifying meanings and fostering mutual understanding. The participant noted that when verbal explanations were insufficient, they relied on showing images on their smartphone, explaining, *"If the person I was talking to doesn't know what the object is... I just show them with my smartphone."* He believed that utilizing technology, such as smartphones, to visually explain concepts or objects unfamiliar to peers is an innovative strategy to bridge linguistic gaps and clarify meanings in cross-cultural interactions.

Student R highlighted the crucial role of his social network, including friends and local residents, in easing his intercultural communication challenges as he shared *"I would ask people around me, friends, lecturers, or professors, when I didn't understand jargon or difficult terms."* These supportive connections not only helped him expand his vocabulary but also fostered confidence in navigating new linguistic and cultural contexts. This shows how external encouragement and cultural insights can support language development. Maintaining attentiveness and mindfulness during challenging conversations, including consistent eye contact and active listening, ensures understanding and respect, even in intimidating situations. Student R emphasized as essential components of effective communication as he stated, *"I'm quite attentive so I just pay attention to the person I'm talking to, and that's how I make sure that I'm doing the right eye contact to stay mindful."*

Based on his reflective notes in public speaking class, student R also adopted voice modulation techniques to ensure his speech was clear and engaging. He adjusted his tone, volume, and pace depending on the situation, enhancing his ability to connect with diverse audiences, demonstrating his awareness of linguistic and cultural sensitivities, as written in his reflective note, *"In speech delivery, voice modulation is also crucial which includes tone, pronunciation, phrasing, inflection, etc.."* This approach is crucial for maintaining audience engagement and ensuring message clarity.

Student R was conscious of maintaining appropriate personal space during interactions, adjusting his proximity based on familiarity with the person. R recognized and adapted to differences in proxemics between Indonesian and American cultures. He observed, *"In general, people in the U.S. have bigger personal space but are more open to touch-based greetings such as hugs."* This understanding helped him manage physical boundaries effectively, ensuring his interactions were culturally appropriate and comfortable for all parties. This awareness of personal boundaries facilitates professional and efficient communication.

In terms of adaptability and flexibility in conversations, student R emphasizes the importance of adapting to the conversational styles and personalities of others. He adjusted his language style and choice of words based on the listener's background, ensuring clarity and inclusivity. For instance, he mentioned simplifying his vocabulary when interacting with non-native English speakers: *"I had to adapt by using English that was easier to understand, such as not using advanced vocabulary and not speaking too fast."* By understanding and adjusting to

different character traits, he ensures effective communication across diverse intercultural contexts.

Living in an English-speaking environment in California, daily practice in an English-speaking environment helped Student R develop fluency and adaptability, particularly in informal language contexts, presenting a stark contrast to prior textbook-based learning in Indonesia. R emphasized the importance of immersion in enhancing his intercultural communication skills. He described how interacting with locals daily allowed him to learn and practice language in real-life contexts: *“Speaking English became an obligation because we live abroad... it’s about learning by doing.”* This practical approach improved his fluency and comfort with various conversational styles.

Recognizing potential limitations in verbal communication, R suggests using technology and written communication as alternatives. In instances where verbal communication failed, R embraced alternative methods, such as gestures or simplified language, to convey his message. He stated, *“Body language and gestures are innate, and while they aren’t always the focus, they complement verbal communication and help make it more convincing.”* This integrative approach allowed him to bridge gaps and enhance mutual understanding. It assists him in maintaining communication even when language barriers or other constraints exist. Through these strategies, R demonstrates a holistic approach to language learning, balancing verbal and non-verbal techniques, leveraging support systems, and integrating real-life practice and technology to overcome intercultural communication challenges.

Intercultural Communication Competence Development

Student R's experiences during his his time as an exchange student at UC Davis and subsequent professional journey, demonstrate significant progress in developing intercultural communication competence (ICC). This growth is reflected in both his personal and professional growth, showcasing how immersive intercultural experiences can lead to profound and lasting development. The participant’s experiences and strategies contributed significantly to the development of their intercultural communication competence (ICC). Regular exposure to English in various contexts enhanced their fluency and confidence. He reflected, *“Speaking English is an obligation because we live abroad... it affected how I could make a sentence without thinking, so it affected my fluency in speaking.”*

Furthermore, adapting to different accents and communication styles helped him develop cultural sensitivity and a deeper understanding of interpersonal dynamics. As he explained, *“I think it is necessary to adapt to the person you are talking to and learn to understand people... so that we can better respond to other people who have different characters.”* Student R's immersion in a multicultural environment during his study abroad experience significantly prepared him for a professional career in a multinational company. He highlighted that living and studying in California provided him with daily opportunities to interact with individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, sharpening his communication skills and cultural adaptability. *“Speaking English became an obligation... interacting from day to day with people from different characters and backgrounds really influenced how I could speak fluently and adjust to their ways of communicating,”* This aligns with the behavioral component of ICC, which includes adaptability and the ability to act appropriately in multicultural interactions (Byram, 1997, as cited in Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2023).

Student R’s ICC also extended to professional contexts, as his study abroad experience prepared him to thrive in a multinational work environment. He stated, *“The professionalism of my work is measured by my interactions with foreigners... meetings with foreign nationals, zoom meetings with Japanese, Chinese, Europeans, and so on”* (dialogue 19). These experiences highlight the practical application of ICC in maintaining professionalism and fostering

productive international collaborations. This aligns with the behavioral component of ICC proposed by Byram in 1997, which includes adaptability and the ability to act appropriately in multicultural interactions. Student R concluded that his multicultural exposure not only improved his English proficiency but also enhanced his intercultural competence, preparing him to thrive in professional settings. By aiming to create communication strategies that support linguistic diversity and intercultural understanding, student R expects in contributing to broader global and local goals. These efforts emphasize the importance of inclusivity and respect for diverse communication. This supports the cognitive component of ICC proposed by Byram (1997), which involves understanding cultural differences and applying this knowledge to foster effective communication.

Looking forward, he is committed to further refining his verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication skills. He recognizes the importance of mastering these skills for future success in cross-cultural communication and leadership roles. By honing his abilities, R aspires to make significant contributions to promoting intercultural understanding, developing effective communication strategies, and supporting linguistic diversity both within Indonesia and on a global scale. This long-term vision showcases his dedication to personal and professional excellence in intercultural communication. This equal with the motivational dimension of ICC, which reflects a willingness to continually improve and engage with new cultural challenges. (Kim, 2001 as cited in Luo et al 2019).

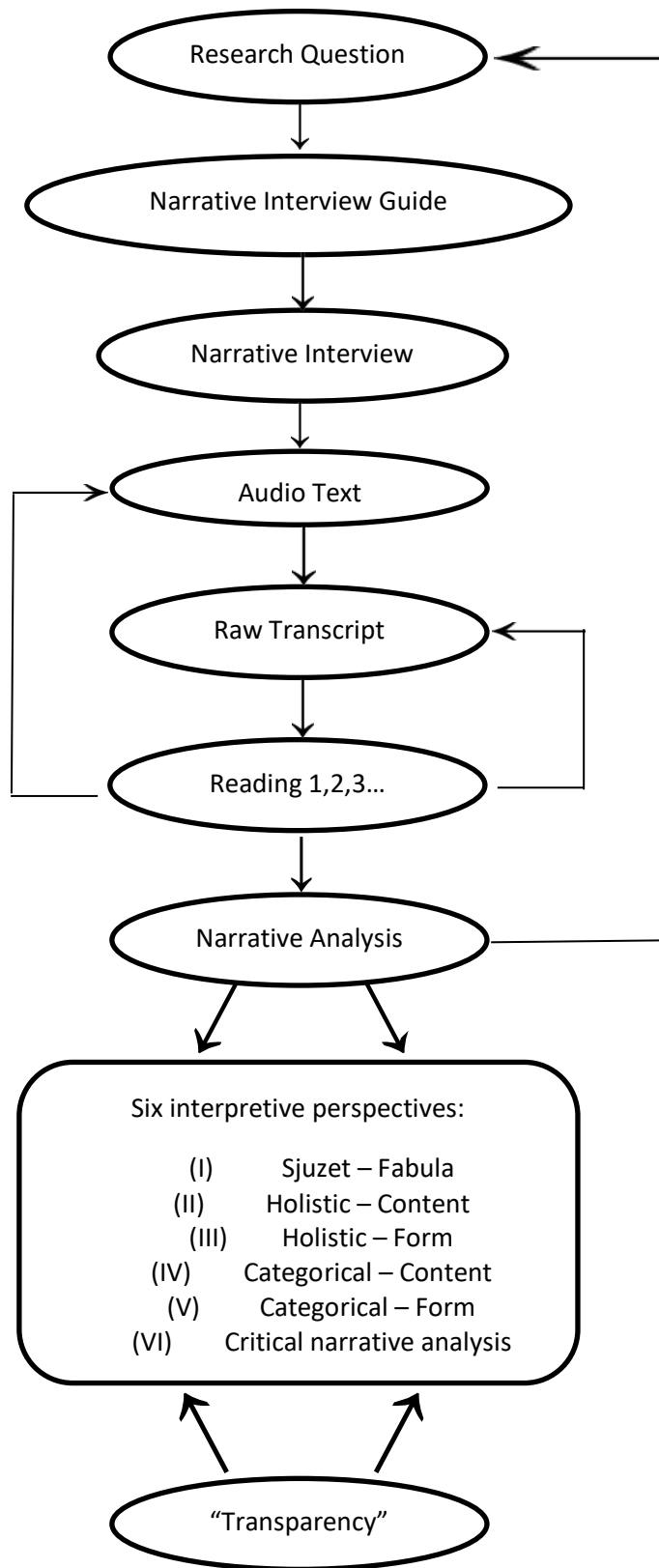
Table 1. Table of Spesification

No.	Components of Interview	Number of Interview Question
1.	Verbal communication challenges	Orientation: 1,2,3 Complication: 4,5,6
2.	Non-verbal communication challenges	Orientation: 7,8 Complication: 11,12
3.	Verbal communication strategies	Resolution: 9,10,17
4.	Non-verbal communication strategies	Resolution: 13,14, 18
5.	Development of Intercultural Communication Competence	Overall reflection: 15,16,19

Table 2. Table of weekly progress

Weekly Progress			
Date	Daily Task	Time Start	Time End
3-6-2024	Read interview dialogue thoroughly	15.00	16.00
3-6-2024	Summarize important notes from the interview	16.00	17.00
3-6-2024	Create main idea of each dialogue	18.30	19.00
3-6-2024	Create key word of each main idea	19.30	20.00
4-6-2024	Create categorisation of key word	15.00	16.00
4-6-2024	Create theme of categorisation	16.00	17.00
4-6-2024	Connect the theme sequentially	18.30	19.00
5-6-2024	Read the written reflection and reflective notes thoroughly	15.00	16.00
5-6-2024	Mark important part of written reflection and reflective notes	16.00	16.30
5-6-2024	Create the theme/labels	16.30	17.00
5-6-2024	Construct the findings from written reflection, interview transcript, and reflective notes.	19.00	22.00

Picture 1. Narrative Study



Model of Narrative Oriented Inquiry (Hiles & Čermák, 2008)

Discussion

Student R's experiences, as revealed through the findings, provide valuable insights into the verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication challenges and strategies encountered during his exchange experience, as well as the profound impact these experiences have on professional readiness. The discussion focuses on how these challenges and strategies contribute to the development of intercultural communication competence, drawing connections between R's experiences and the broader theoretical framework of intercultural communication.

The first theme highlight that adapting to linguistic and cultural discrepancy is central to intercultural communication. Student R encountered challenges in understanding accents, dialects, and local expressions, which align with the concept of *linguistic relativity*, suggesting that language shapes one's worldview. His difficulties with accents from diverse ethnic backgrounds and the rhetorical styles of U.S. speakers emphasized the complexity of verbal communication in multicultural settings. However, his ability to adapt reflects the development of *intercultural sensitivity*, as proposed by Bennett (1993) as cited in Dai & Chen (2014).

Similarly, student R's recognition of non-verbal communication, such as proxemics and gestures, illustrates the interplay between verbal and non-verbal cues in creating meaningful interactions. His adjustment to American norms of personal space and body language reflects an understanding of cultural proxemics, a critical component of intercultural competence (Hall et al., 2019). While he emphasized verbal communication as primary, his integration of non-verbal elements highlights the holistic nature of effective intercultural interaction. Student R emphasizes that effective communication transcends mere language proficiency or fluency, encompassing cultural sensitivity, relationship-building, and conflict resolution within diverse contexts. This perspective pointed the importance of adapting to local habits and building harmonious relationships as integral to sustainable communication.

Furthermore, student R's experience in adapting to linguistic dynamics in Davis, California reveals challenges in navigating local dialectical features such as monophthongal shifts. This adaptation process not only enriches understanding of regional linguistic diversity but also enhances proficiency in varied dialectical norms. Differences in language proficiency and cultural backgrounds require adjustments in speech and comprehension, highlighting the significance of linguistic flexibility and empathy in bridging communication gaps (Goertler & Schenker, 2021).

In addition, student R acknowledges the evolution of language beyond traditional grammatical rules, emphasizing societal acceptance and reception of language usage. This recognition highlighted the dynamic nature of language and its role in effective societal communication (Hans & Hans, 2015). Cultural influences on communication style between US citizens/students and international peers, particularly from Indonesia, are explored, revealing contrasting approaches in directness and contextual understanding. These differences underscore the cultural distinction that shape communication norms and practices.

Besides that, student R discussed the importance of accent adaptation and vocabulary variation in enhancing communication effectiveness across diverse social contexts. Interaction with individuals from diverse backgrounds enriches language proficiency and fosters integration within communities based on shared linguistic practices. In conclusion, student R's experiences in verbal and non-verbal intercultural challenges underscore the complexity of communication adaptation in diverse cultural and linguistic environments, emphasizing the continuous learning process and the importance of cultural sensitivity in effective cross-cultural interactions.

The second theme observed was the verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication strategies. R's use of strategies such as active listening, visual aids, and adaptability demonstrates the importance of *communicative resourcefulness* in overcoming linguistic

barriers. Active listening allowed him to decode unfamiliar accents and cultural meanings, supporting Spitzberg and Cupach's (1984) model of *interpersonal communication competence* as cited in (Goertler & Schenker, 2021) which emphasizes listening as a core skill. This active listening approach supports effective communication by ensuring comprehension and maintaining engagement with diverse interlocutors (Fitriyah, et al., 2024). Similarly, his reliance on visual aids and simplified language demonstrates a practical approach to achieving clarity, particularly in diverse contexts where linguistic proficiency varies.

Mindfulness, voice modulation, and adaptability were crucial in student R's interactions, highlighting the importance of self-regulation and situational awareness. His ability to adjust his speaking style to accommodate others aligns with the *accommodation theory* (Giles & Coupland, 1991) as cited in (Dai & Chen, 2014) which posits that speaker modify his communication to converge with their conversational partners. Furthermore, his immersion in daily interactions and his willingness to embrace mistakes illustrate *experiential learning* (Kolb, 1984) as cited in (Hall et al., 2019) as a pathway to intercultural competence. Furthermore, student R highlights the crucial role of a supportive network in his language development journey. Support from friends and local residents, including his elderly host family ("granny"), provides not only encouragement but also practical assistance and cultural insights. This community support enriches his daily interactions and contributes significantly to language adaptation and growth. Moreover, he navigates personal space boundaries thoughtfully, adjusting proximity based on familiarity with individuals. This approach respects cultural norms and promotes comfortable and professional communication, fostering positive interpersonal interactions.

The first and second theme from student R's experiences at UC Davis are intricately correlated, emphasizing the development and application of effective verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication strategies. The first finding highlights the identification of communication challenges and the implementation of corresponding strategies that student R employed during his semester abroad. These strategies, such as active listening, cultural adaptation, and technology use, were crucial in navigating linguistic and cultural differences.

In contrast, the second theme delves into the broader implications of these strategies on student R's intercultural communication competence. It underscores how these strategies not only addressed immediate challenges but also fostered his growth in understanding cultural differences, building relationships, and navigating diverse communication contexts effectively. Together, these findings depict a holistic approach where practical communication strategies directly contribute to enhanced intercultural competence, preparing student R for successful interactions in global academic and professional settings.

The last theme observed was the intercultural communication competence development. R's experiences in a multicultural environment equipped him with skills transferable to professional contexts, particularly in multinational organizations. His ability to navigate linguistic and cultural diversity mirrors the competencies outlined in Dearsorff's (2006) *intercultural competence model*, as cited in (Hall, Horgan, & Murphy, 2018) which emphasizes adaptability, empathy, and effective communication. For example, R's adjustment to diverse accents and rhetorical styles prepared him for collaboration in diverse teams, a common feature of global workplaces.

Student R's transformative journey at UC Davis significantly contributed to his personal growth in communication skills, particularly in developing courage, directness, and assertiveness in expressing opinions and managing confrontations. This growth is attributed to his immersion in a multicultural environment that encouraged him to navigate diverse perspectives and communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. The university experience provided important opportunities for student R to refine his communication style and adapt to varying communication norms.

The last theme illustrates the culmination of these skills in student R's professional life. It showcases how his enhanced intercultural communication competence from UC Davis translates into practical success in a multinational company. Here, he demonstrates confidence, professionalism, and adaptability in communicating with colleagues and clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. This includes effective communication strategies learned through public speaking classes, which refine his ability to articulate ideas clearly and engage audiences persuasively. Together, these themes underscore a seamless progression where the intercultural communication competence developed during student R's academic journey at UC Davis directly contributes to his effectiveness in global professional environments. They highlight not only the educational value of his experiences but also their tangible impact on his career readiness and success in navigating international business interactions.

Ultimately, student R's experiences at UC Davis highlight the transformative impact of higher education in fostering both personal and professional growth in communication. The integration of multicultural perspectives, practical communication skills development, and exposure to diverse cultural contexts have collectively contributed to student R's enhanced intercultural communication competence and preparedness for global professional environments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result and discussion, it can be concluded that student R's journey at UC Davis illustrates the dynamic interplay between language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and professional growth. His initial challenges in adapting to local dialects and cultural norms highlight the importance of interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, and conflict resolution in effective communication. Student R's proactive approach to learning regional linguistic dynamics enhanced his ability to navigate diverse dialectical norms and communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. Academically, student R's experiences emphasized the significance of linguistic flexibility and clarity in interactions among diverse student groups. Professionally, his immersion in a multinational environment further honed his intercultural communication skills, preparing him to engage confidently with colleagues and clients from various cultural backgrounds. Overall, student R's journey at UC Davis exemplifies the transformative impact of higher education in fostering comprehensive communication skills and intercultural competence essential for global citizenship and professional success.

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