



Cross Cultural Communication Strategies for Teaching Teams in PKBM Junggel Salatiga, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study aims to examine cross-cultural communication in the multicultural environment of PKBM Junggel School Salatiga. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing observation and in-depth interview techniques. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, comprising 13 teachers and 2 principals with over a year of experience working in multicultural teams. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that cross-cultural communication at PKBM Junggel School Salatiga runs effectively despite various challenges. The diverse backgrounds of educators, both local and international, make Junggel School a rich learning space with perspectives that are prone to miscommunication. Key challenges include differences in communication styles (high vs. low context), culture shock, and interpretation of non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, eye contact, and body language. The effectiveness of cross-cultural communication is achieved through specific managerial strategies, including cultural training, reflective forums, and open communication. These strategies have successfully created an inclusive, harmonious, and responsive collaborative environment that meets the needs of global learners. Diversity is viewed not as an obstacle but as a strategic asset that enriches the pedagogical approach and builds education based on values of tolerance and mutual respect.

Article History

Received: 17-04-2025

Revised: 24-05-2025

Accepted: 16-06-2025

Published: 25-07-2025

Key Words:

Cross-Cultural
Communication;
Multicultural Education;
Community Learning
Center.

How to Cite: Vieira, D., Ismanto, B., & Iriani, A. (2025). Cross Cultural Communication Strategies for Teaching Teams in PKBM Junggel Salatiga, Indonesia. *Jurnal Paedagogy*, 12(3), 897-906. doi:<https://doi.org/10.33394/jp.v12i3.15712>



<https://doi.org/10.33394/jp.v12i3.15712>

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Introduction

In today's diverse educational landscape, managing multicultural academic teams presents significant challenges. According to (Ibrohim and Anshori, 2025) cultural diversity in work teams provides great potential, such as broader perspectives and higher innovation, but also presents challenges in communication, values and work styles. The same thing was stated by (Purbianto et al., 2023) work teams with diverse cultural backgrounds can help teams become more creative and innovative because each person brings different perspectives and experiences, but one of the main challenges is communication. According to, (Aswaruddin et al., 2025) in the era of globalization, effective development relationships depend heavily on cross-cultural communication. This refers to the process of sharing information, ideas, and values between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds (Hofstede, 2001 in Aswaruddin et al., 2025).

Differences in language, speech, cultural understanding and even body language can cause problems and tensions within a group. Some cultures emphasize direct and assertive communication, while others rely on indirect discourse that can be potentially misinterpreted. This can occur due to differences in interpretation of nonverbal communication, language



patterns, and cultural views on certain situations (Efendi et al., 2024). Furthermore, non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice vary widely across cultures, further complicating interactions. According to (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2021 in Efendi et al., 2024) situations like this can cause tension between individuals or groups. Specifically in the context of education, it can affect the building of trust, collaboration, and overall team efficiency in educational institutions (Schachner et al., 2020).

According to (Arfin, 2023) in the era of globalization, understanding different cultural contexts is essential to achieve effective communication in terms of cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions has a significant role and plays a role in building appropriate interactions so as to reduce misunderstandings, meaning the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences is very important. Not only respecting trust is also a key element in building intercultural relationships. When trust is built, there is openness, mutual acceptance and support between each other. (Aswaruddin et al., 2025) stated that cross-cultural communication is very important because the ability to engage effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds can significantly affect the success of an organization.

Cross-cultural communication is one of the factors that can determine the success of individuals to communicate and work together in diverse cultural contexts (Fatimah and Perkasa, 2024). (Rahayuningsih, 2014 in Anshori, 2020) emphasizes that it is not only the importance of cross-cultural communication but also the role of communication itself cannot be avoided, the involvement of employees or workers from various regions and even countries is a must, the wheels of the organization must continue to run because it greatly determines the quality of the organization. This means that the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication is very important and has an impact on all fields including education. With different cultural contexts and backgrounds, communication effectiveness is the key to determining the success of an educational institution.

Many studies have supported the importance of cross-cultural communication in the educational environment. (Setyati, 2024) researched the according to him intercultural communication is important in the educational environment so it cannot be ignored. The results found that inclusive and effective communication in a multicultural environment can be created with the role of public relations. (Hayat Muzahid and Heni Hayat, 2019) examined further the "Adaptation of Foreign Teacher Communication Facing Cultural Differences in International Schools". The results found that there were "cultural problems" when encountering cultural differences. (Afandi, 2024) with the study "Multicultural Communication in Education: Facing the Challenges of Cultural Diversity in Schools" found that multicultural communication in schools faces various challenges, especially in terms of language barriers and cultural stereotypes. However, there are several strategies that can be implemented to overcome these challenges.

It can be concluded that the challenges of cross-cultural communication continue to be an important problem to address. This is not only a matter of culture but also a matter of trust in working together, being open, and accepting each other in striving for quality education in the field of education. Therefore, unlike previous studies, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of communication in a multicultural education team at the Community Learning Activity Center (PKBM) Junggel School Salatiga (JS). PKBM is an institution formed by the community for the community that is engaged in the field of official non-formal education under the supervision and guidance of the Ministry of National Education. PKBM is an institution founded by, from and for the community, meaning that



PKBM has the potential to be an independent institution (Mustopa, 2022). Community Learning Activity Center or better known as PKBM is a non-formal educational institution that was born from the awareness and maturity of the community regarding the importance of education for the development of quality human resources in the order of national and state life (Sunaiyah, 2022).

PKBM JS in Salatiga is an institution located in the Salatiga area, Central Java, Indonesia and is responsible for managing early childhood education (Paud) to junior high school education (SMP). This school is present with a diverse cultural context, both nationally and even internationally. Both students and educators come from various countries, ranging from Indonesia, the United States, Canada, Australia, South Korea, Japan, Brazil, Argentina, Costa Rica, Sri Lanka, India, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Liberia, Ethiopia, Italy, Russia, Singapore, Peru, France, Scotland, Malaysia, and Libya. Schools like this are not easy to find in Western countries or in other regions in Indonesia (Tambunan & Sidabutar, 2022). This diversity becomes an echo of education that is no longer national but international in the global education landscape.

This study will further examine, amidst the diversity of tribes, cultures, languages and customs, how effective is cross-cultural communication at PKBM Junggel School, specifically for teachers or the education team. The education team is an important pioneer, like a driving force that operates all PKBM activities. The education team in this context is the teacher and also the principal. It is hoped that by reviewing the extent of the effectiveness of communication in the education team at PKBM JS, it can bring theoretical benefits by contributing ideas to the context of multicultural and even global education. In addition, it can be a basis for reviewing each element in communication effectiveness, both challenges, opportunities, and strengths for the progress of Junggel School education.

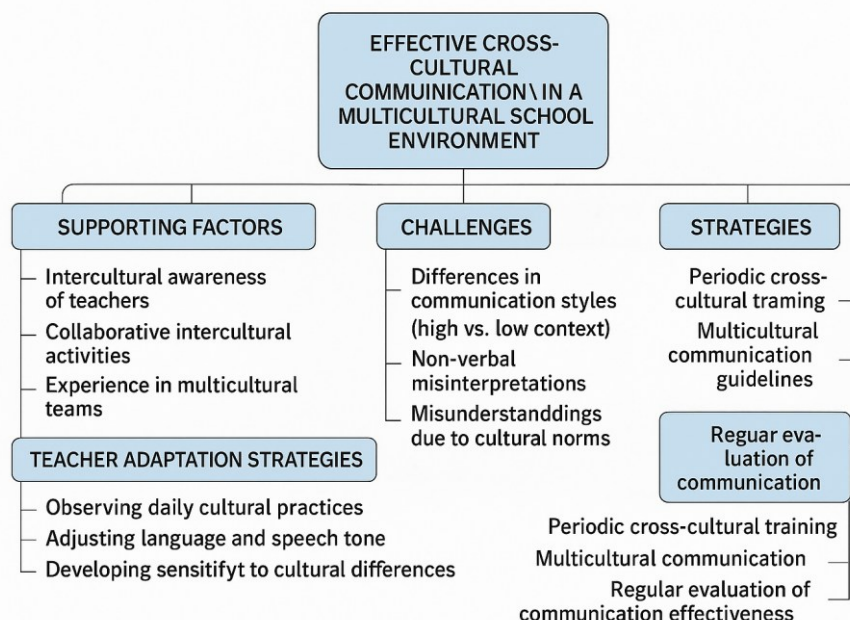
Research Method

The method used in this study is descriptive with a qualitative approach. Data were collected using observation and in-depth interviews, with structured interview guidelines. Participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, a technique that selects participants with certain considerations according to research needs (Sugiyono, 2019). Some of these considerations include: 1) participants are active staff and educators at Junggel School. 2) participants are school leaders. 3) participants have more than 1 year of educational experience building performance with other multicultural educator teams. Based on these criteria, the participants in this study were 13 teachers from various cultural backgrounds, and 2 principals at Junggel School.

The data analysis technique used the Miles and Huberman model, namely: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Mezmir, 2020). To ensure the validity and reliability of the data in this study, method triangulation and source triangulation were used. Method triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of two data collection techniques, namely direct observation and in-depth interviews (Moelong, 2004). Meanwhile, Source Triangulation was applied by involving participants from various roles and cultural backgrounds, namely teachers and principals in a multicultural school environment (Sugiyono, 2019). This was done to capture various perspectives on the cross-cultural communication phenomenon being studied.



Results and Discussion



Jungle School is a multicultural educational institution, with students from more than 20 countries. Not only students, teachers and every staff come from various cultural backgrounds such as Javanese, Papuan, Batak Toba, Ambonese, American, Malay Riau, and Kalimantan. Currently JS offers classes from age 2 to Junior High School (SMP). This diversity is seen as a strength because it allows for a wider range of perspectives and knowledge that is beneficial to students. However, this also presents challenges in communication between fellow educators. One of the main challenges found in this study was the difficulty in understanding the different cultural norms and expectations between teachers and students, as well as between fellow educators who have very diverse cultural backgrounds. (Shadevan, 2021) stated the same thing that the challenge of cross-cultural communication is understanding different cultural norms and expectations.

Based on findings in the field, one of the challenges faced is culture shock. According to (Mustofa and Defiana, 2024) Culture shock is an assumption that is present in a situation that causes individuals to experience discomfort and stress because they are in an environment that is different from their original environment. This occurs in the relationship and joint performance of educators at Jungle School. A teacher from America who had just joined Jungle School experienced culture shock when he first worked with a fellow teacher from Java in planning teaching and learning activities. The American teacher was accustomed to a work culture that was direct, open, and to the point in conveying ideas and criticism. In a team meeting, he frankly criticized his fellow teacher's lesson plan which was considered ineffective, with the intention of improving and increasing quality. However, the teacher from Java felt offended by the way he delivered it. In Javanese culture, conveying criticism directly in public is considered impolite and can damage social harmony. As a result, the local teacher became silent, avoided further discussion, and began to keep his distance in teamwork.

If examined further, this culture shock occurs due to differences in communication styles between individuals with different cultural backgrounds. (Hall, 1976 in Broeder, 2021) states that culture can be seen from the context that influences it, there are high-context and



low-context cultures. In the context of culture shock that occurred at Junggel School, what was conveyed by (Hall, 1976) occurred. According to him, Asian culture usually prefers high-context messages, messages that are conveyed implicitly and indirectly or are often conveyed visually. Conversely, in low-context cultures, information or messages are conveyed explicitly and this is often found in western culture.

Junggel School has both contexts, namely high and low contexts. This is verified from the data of multicultural educators. Not only from the local island of Java and its surroundings, but also in the national and even global realms. Therefore, high context and low context are often encountered and become problems such as variations in communication styles. Educators from high context tend to have an indirect or implicit communication style and teachers from low context tend to convey communication explicitly. For example, direct and indirect communication preferences can cause unwanted conflicts.

Other challenges found in interviews and group discussions revealed that one of the communication challenges between educators is non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is a form of conveying messages without using words (Purba and Siahaan, 2022). (Widiyanarti et al., 2024) expressed the same thing that non-verbal communication is permanent and always there. This means that non-verbal communication is an authentic part of the self that is born explicitly without being made up. In a multicultural and diverse environment like Junggel School, non-verbal communication is an important aspect as well as a major challenge in interactions between educators. Referring to Matsumoto's thoughts (2006 in Purba and Siahaan, 2022), there are three main elements of non-verbal communication that often cause misunderstandings in this environment: facial expressions, eye contact, and the use of gestures. Facial expressions are one of the most universal forms of non-verbal communication but can still trigger differences in interpretation. This was also conveyed by (Surya et al., 2022) that nonverbal misinterpretation can be a major source of miscommunication.

At Junggel School, the challenge that arises with facial expressions is the difference in how educators display or hide emotions. For example, educators from cultures that emphasize politeness may tend to withhold expressions of anger or disappointment, while educators from more expressive cultures may show their disappointment openly. This often leads to misinterpretation. An expression that is intended as assertiveness may be interpreted as anger, while a blank face may be misinterpreted as disinterest or indifference. This lack of synchrony between intent and interpretation is a source of hidden conflict in professional interactions.

Eye contact is also a source of challenges in non-verbal communication at Junggel School. In some cultures, making direct eye contact shows respect, openness, and honesty. However, in other cultures, too much eye contact is considered challenging or impolite, especially in interactions with older or authoritative figures. In a diverse educational environment, these differing perceptions of the meaning of eye contact often lead to misunderstandings. An educator who avoids the eyes may be seen as insecure or hiding something, when in fact it is a form of respect in his culture. Conversely, making direct eye contact can be seen as intimidating by colleagues from other cultures.

Gestures, such as hand movements, head nods, or posture when speaking, are another important element of non-verbal communication that are prone to misinterpretation. At Sekolah Junggel, educators come from different cultural backgrounds and have different meanings for the same gestures. For example, a particular hand gesture may be seen as affirming in one culture but rude or offensive in another. In addition, the way we walk, the



position we stand in during a discussion, or the way we point can also be uncomfortable if they are not in line with the customs of our colleagues. The main challenge arises when there is a lack of shared understanding of the meaning and context of these gestures, leading to miscommunication even when the verbal message has been clearly conveyed.

With so many challenges, is cross-cultural communication effective in the context of multicultural PKBM Junggel School education? According to (Hoftsede 2001 in Surya et al., 2022) there are three main elements in the acculturation process, namely: awareness, knowledge and skills. When these three elements have been passed seriously, the cross-cultural communication process will indirectly run effectively. Based on the research process through group discussions and personal interviews, every challenge faced was taken seriously in maintaining effective communication. This is important because the impact of ineffective communication greatly affects the quality and quality of education. (Aswaruddin et al., 2025) stated that cross-cultural communication is very important in improving the quality of education, especially in a multicultural educational environment.

Effective communication impacts the relationships and performance of educators. And the leadership of Jungle School truly understands this problem. The Principal of Jungle School, Rio Dannel Gurzi stated that differences should be seen as opportunities and not obstacles. According to Rio, cultural diversity actually opens up space for a broader and more inclusive pedagogical approach. In conclusion, diversity is an asset that can be utilized to broaden the horizons of both educators and students. Therefore, the school management strongly emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural communication training as a foundation in building a collaborative work environment.

There are various strategies carried out to maintain the effectiveness and quality of education at PKBM Junggel School. One of the routine activities carried out is a cultural awareness conference (cultural awareness workshop). This activity aims to bridge intercultural understanding and provide space for educators to learn from each other, understand, and respect the values and unique expressions of their colleagues' cultures. Learning other cultures is one of the strategic efforts that greatly helps every educator in a multicultural context. (Surya et al., 2022) explain that to minimize cross-cultural communication problems, both leaders and members and even all elements need to acquire new knowledge between cultures. The knowledge in question does not stop at the level of knowing, but by truly understanding, doing and most importantly at the level of awareness.

In addition, this training is designed in a structured and participatory manner, so that it not only conveys theories about culture, but also invites educators to reflect on their personal experiences in interacting across cultures. As a result, educators continue to be equipped with awareness, knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills both verbally and non-verbally such as facial expressions, gestures, or eye contact. All strategies carried out by school leaders help reduce negative assumptions and increase mutual understanding. Even a sense of belonging, empathy and sharing are characteristics and strengths for Junggel School as an empowered community institution to empower the education of the Indonesian nation. This finding is in line with (Arumita, 2023 in Mumtaz et al., 2024) that in order to convey messages effectively, it is important to practice recognizing verbal language and non-verbal cues such as movement, posture, and eye contact from each cultural background.

Furthermore, Jungle School places open and continuous communication as a basic principle in managing the dynamics of differences. Teachers are encouraged to not only learn from training, but also to build reflective and empathetic daily communication. This aims to minimize all triggers of conflict due to differences by increasing awareness of understanding



and respecting other people's cultures (Widiyanarti et al., 2024). To realize this awareness, weekly discussion activities, cross-cultural experience sharing forums, and continuous evaluation of intercultural communication practices are carried out. All of this is part of the school management strategy in ensuring that efforts to build cultural understanding are not temporary, but integrated into the school's work culture.

These efforts have a significant impact on relationships between individuals in the school environment, both between educators and students, and between educators themselves. Relationships built within a framework of cross-cultural understanding create an inclusive, respectful, and prejudice-free learning climate. Educators are not only learning facilitators, but also agents of social transformation who are able to instill the values of tolerance and diversity in students. This is important social capital in shaping the character of students who are adaptive, open, and ready to live in a diverse global society.

In this context, cross-cultural communication strategy is not only an administrative complement, but also a fundamental pillar that supports Junggel School's vision as a progressive PKBM that is responsive to the needs of the times. By making cultural diversity a strength and responding to it with various positive activities, now cross-cultural communication is not a barrier but a main strength that is a characteristic when people seek and explore Junggel School. With all these efforts and efforts, Junggel School has proven that community-based education is able to create a safe, empowering, and liberating space where everyone is valued and has the same opportunity to grow and develop.

Conclusion

This study shows that cross-cultural communication in the multicultural environment of PKBM Junggel School Salatiga runs effectively despite facing various challenges. The diversity of educators' backgrounds, both from within and outside the country, makes Junggel School a learning space that is rich in perspective but vulnerable to miscommunication. The main challenges faced include differences in communication styles (high vs low context), culture shock, and interpretation of non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, eye contact, and body language. The effectiveness of cross-cultural communication can be achieved through structured managerial strategies, such as cultural training, reflective forums, and open communication. These strategies have succeeded in creating a collaborative environment that is inclusive, harmonious, and responsive to the needs of global learners. Diversity is not considered an obstacle, but rather a strategic asset to enrich the pedagogical approach and build education based on values of tolerance and mutual respect.

Recommendation

Although cross-cultural communication in the school environment is currently quite effective, efforts to maintain and improve it need to be done strategically and continuously. Therefore, the following recommendations are addressed to school leaders, including school management, multicultural education coordinators, and professional development teams:

- 1) Periodic Improvement of Cultural Training. Conduct regular cross-cultural training for all educators, both local and international, with a focus on understanding communication styles (high vs. low context), cultural norms, and non-verbal expressions. Involve facilitators from various cultural backgrounds to enrich the perspectives in training.
- 2) Preparation of Multicultural Communication Guidelines. Create an internal guide that contains the principles of cross-cultural communication, non-verbal communication



ethics, and intercultural interaction protocols in the school environment. This guide can be used as a mandatory reference for new educators.

- 3) Periodic Evaluation of Communication Effectiveness. Conduct regular surveys and observations to measure the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication in schools and identify areas that still need improvement. The results of the evaluation should be used as a basis for preparing further professional development programs.

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