Article

Exploring Intercultural Competence:
A Case Study of an Indonesian Muslim Doctoral Student in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development of intercultural competence through the lived experience of an Indonesian doctoral Muslim student pursuing higher education in Australia. We employ a narrative inquiry case study approach; the research delves into the participants' personal and academic journeys, examining how intercultural interactions in a foreign educational environment shape their understanding and adaptation to cultural differences. The analysis focuses on the linguistic and experiential aspects of the student's narrative, using transitivity analysis to investigate the processes, actions, and experiences the student describes during their intercultural encounters. Additionally, language appraisal is employed to assess students' emotional responses, attitudes, and evaluations of intercultural situations. This dual analysis provides a comprehensive view of how intercultural competence is constructed and navigated in a cross-cultural context. The findings highlight the dynamic interplay between cultural identity, language, and academic adaptation, offering insights into how students from Indonesia develop intercultural skills in international settings.

Keywords: Appraisal, intercultural competence, narrative case study, transitivity, student experience, international student

In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, intercultural competence has become essential for individuals, particularly those pursuing education in foreign countries. This competence refers to communicating effectively and appropriately across different cultural contexts and adapting behavior, attitudes, and communication strategies to bridge cultural divides (Deardorff, 2006). For international students, such as Indonesians studying in Australia, developing intercultural competence is critical for their academic success and their ability to integrate socially and thrive in a foreign environment. As international students continue to rise globally, there is a pressing need to understand how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds experience and develop intercultural competence during their educational journeys.

Indonesia and Australia share a solid educational relationship, with Australia being a popular destination for Indonesian students seeking higher education opportunities. Despite the geographic proximity and shared cultural values between the two countries, Indonesian students often face challenges when transitioning to the Australian academic and social environment. These challenges may include language barriers, differences in educational expectations, and cultural misunderstandings, all of which require the development of intercultural competence to navigate successfully. When international students transition to living and studying in unfamiliar settings, they face various challenges that test their adaptability (Kim, 2024). The cultural adaptation process for these students is often marked by transformative experiences that shape their worldviews, values and approaches to communication. While significant research has explored the experiences of international students and the development of intercultural competence, there remains a critical gap in understanding these phenomena from the perspective of Indonesian students studying in Australia. Much of the literature focuses on broader, generalized experiences of international students from multiple backgrounds, often neglecting Indonesian students' specific cultural, social, and linguistic challenges. Furthermore, most intercultural competence research tends to emphasize quantitative approaches, which may overlook the deep, qualitative nuances of individual experiences and the need to capture the personal and emotional dimensions of cultural adaptation.

This narrative case study investigates the development of intercultural competence in Indonesian students during their academic journeys in Australia. By focusing on a single participant, the study offers a nuanced exploration of how intercultural competence evolves and is shaped by the individual's encounters, challenges, and reflections. We employ a narrative inquiry approach that allows for an in-depth understanding of the student's personal experiences, providing rich insights into critical moments of cultural adaptation and growth. This method places the participant's voice at the center, capturing the complexity and dynamism of their intercultural interactions. Moreover, studies on intercultural competence in Australian higher education have generally focused on students' experiences from more prominent international student populations, such as Chinese or Indian students (Montgomery, 2010). Consequently,

Indonesian students' unique experiences—marked by distinct cultural, linguistic, and educational differences—are underrepresented in the current research. This lack of focused attention creates a knowledge gap that this study seeks to address, providing a case study that foregrounds the Indonesian perspective in the broader discourse on intercultural competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Doctoral Education

Doctoral students develop their identities as they strive to become members of the academic community (Cotterall, 2011). However, these programs often provide limited chances for peer interaction and self-reflection (Austin, 2002). For some, the doctoral journey can be stressful and anxiety-inducing due to isolation, unclear program goals and expectations, inadequate awareness of academic career paths, and internal doubts about whether pursuing a PhD aligns with their values (Skyrme, 2007). It can lead to a loss of motivation, prolonged completion times, or even dropping out of the program (Wright & Cochrane, 2000). Conversely, a strong sense of identity can create new opportunities for PhD students to take on different roles within the academic community, allowing them to recognize the significance of becoming researchers (McAlpinea & Amundsen, 2009). It remains to be explored how these experiences, along with their connections to others within their networks, contribute to shaping and reshaping their personal and professional identities (Teng, 2019). Despite these insights, more research is needed to fully understand doctoral students' experiences and how their interactions within their networks shape their personal and professional identity development.

Intercultural Competence in International Education

Intercultural competence has been widely discussed in international education as a vital skill for students studying abroad. Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence outlines several core components, including attitudes (openness and respect), knowledge (cultural self-awareness), and skills (intercultural communication). These components enable individuals to engage effectively in intercultural settings, fostering academic success and personal growth. Studies have shown that students who develop high levels of intercultural competence often experience greater satisfaction in their international education experiences (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

For students studying in culturally diverse environments, such as Australia, intercultural competence is essential for building relationships, understanding diverse perspectives, and adapting to different academic norms. Research by Montgomery (2010) indicates that international students who demonstrate greater intercultural competence tend to navigate challenges more effectively, including adjusting to new learning styles and coping with cultural isolation. However, developing this competence is not automatic; it often requires reflection, support, and exposure to intercultural interactions.

Indonesian Students Abroad

Indonesian students constitute a significant group among the international student population in Australia because of the country's high-quality education system and geographic proximity (Harrison & Le, 2020). Despite the solid educational ties between the two nations, Indonesian students often face cultural challenges when they transition to the Australian educational environment. These challenges may include language barriers, differences in academic expectations, and cultural misunderstandings (Novera, 2004).

Previous studies have explored the experiences of Indonesian students abroad, highlighting the importance of intercultural competence in facilitating their academic and social integration. Novera (2004) emphasized that Indonesian students' ability to adapt to Australia's more independent and critical-thinking-driven learning environment is a critical factor in their academic success. Moreover, the willingness to engage with students from other cultures and reflect on their cultural assumptions is essential to this process.

Comparative Study in Australia and Indonesia

International students in Australia and Indonesia face significant challenges in adjusting to new cultural, social, and educational environments. In Australia, cultural adjustment is often difficult due to differences in individualistic values and informal student–teacher relationships, especially for students from collectivist societies such as Asia. These students must adapt to a more informal academic environment characterized by group discussions and peer collaboration, which contrasts with the hierarchical educational systems they are accustomed to. Social integration is also challenging due to language barriers and unfamiliar social practices. Nevertheless, Australia's multicultural society offers opportunities for students to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds, aided by support systems such as cultural orientation programs and peer mentoring. Brown & Jones (2015) argued that these support systems are vital in developing intercultural competencies, assisting international students in understanding Australian values and better integrating into the local culture. In the classroom, international students may struggle with the active learning style prevalent in Australia, which encourages critical thinking and self-directed learning. However, this adjustment process fosters growth in intercultural competence. Despite these positives, some international students report experiencing discrimination and racial prejudice, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds, although many institutions are working to create a more inclusive environment.

In Indonesia, international students—particularly those from Western countries—face challenges due to the contrast between their individualistic values and Indonesia's more hierarchical and collectivist culture. Students must adapt to formal social structures and emphasize group harmony and respect for authority, which may be unfamiliar. Language barriers pose another significant challenge, as many students are not fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, although universities offer language support programs. Social integration can be complex,

as students from individualistic cultures may struggle to form deep connections in a culture that values community life. Nevertheless, many international students find comfort in peer networks and cultural exchange programs. Sari et al. (2020) suggested that while cultural sensitivity in Indonesia is generally high, misunderstandings and prejudices can still arise, particularly in more rural or less urbanized areas. In terms of education, Indonesia's teacher-centered and rote learning style contrasts with the more interactive, critical thinking-based approach that students may be accustomed to in the West. However, adapting to this style enhances intercultural competence and helps students better understand local academic expectations. While discrimination is less prevalent in Indonesia, international students from African or Middle Eastern backgrounds may still experience occasional racial prejudice or feel excluded, particularly in rural areas. Language remains a barrier, but language exchange programs help students improve their fluency in Bahasa Indonesia, easing their academic and social integration.

METHOD

The study uses a narrative inquiry case study approach supported by linguistic analysis tools, including transitivity analysis and language appraisal. The rationale behind selecting these methodologies, the participant recruitment process, the data collection techniques, and the data analysis methods will be discussed in detail.

The study adopts a narrative inquiry case study design to capture the lived experiences of Indonesian students in Australia, focusing on their personal, academic, and intercultural challenges. Narrative inquiry allows in-depth exploration of the participants' stories, emphasizing their perspective on cultural adaptation and growth (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach is particularly suitable for investigating complex processes such as intercultural competence, as it allows for examining personal narratives over time, capturing the dynamic nature of cultural learning and adaptation. Focusing on a single participant leverages a case study design to provide a detailed and contextual understanding of intercultural competence in a specific setting. Case studies are particularly effective for exploring unique or underresearched phenomena (Yin, 2014), making this approach ideal for understanding the experiences of an Indonesian student in an Australian academic context, which is a relatively underexplored area in the literature.

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were chosen through purposive sampling, a strategic selection method that allows the researcher to deliberately select individuals expected to provide in-depth and relevant data aligned with the study's objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive sampling is beneficial when the goal is to explore complex phenomena such as intercultural competence, which requires insights from individuals who have directly

experienced the phenomenon under investigation. The selected participant is a doctoral Indonesian student currently enrolled in higher education in Australia.

This participant was chosen for their rich intercultural experiences in academic and social settings. As an international student, he has had to navigate the complexities of adapting to a new cultural environment while maintaining academic performance. His journey offers a unique perspective on intercultural competence development, as he has experienced direct and continuous engagement with a foreign culture, academic system, and social structures. The participants' interactions with peers, instructors, and the broader Australian community provide fertile ground for exploring how intercultural competence evolves.

Furthermore, this participant's background as an Indonesian student presents a valuable context for the study. Indonesia and Australia, while geographically close, have distinct cultural and educational systems. The transition from one cultural context to another—combined with their experiences in a diverse, multicultural academic setting—makes them ideal candidate for examining the nuances of intercultural competence. The insights gained from this student's journey could shed light on the broader experiences of other international students, particularly those from Southeast Asia, in Western academic institutions. The participant's narrative offers rich potential for identifying key moments of cultural adaptation and their challenges and successes in developing practical intercultural communication skills.

Data Collection

Semistructured interviews were the sole data collection method used to understand the participants' experiences comprehensively. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the on critical moments of cultural adaptation, challenges, and learning during their academic journeys in Australia. The semistructured format provided flexibility, enabling the participants to elaborate on specific experiences while ensuring that the discussion was aligned with the research objectives. We conducted several sessions; we offered him prompt questions and continued by clarifying his answer within 60 minutes. The answers were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. Semistructured interviews provided detailed and nuanced insight into the participants' experiences, ensuring the collection of rich, relevant data. In our study, we conducted multiple interview sessions with a participant, an Indonesian student currently enrolled in a doctoral program in Australia. We conducted the first interview session, during which we recorded the conversation. After reviewing the records, we realized that some information was unclear or incomplete. To address this, we arranged a second interview session, asking the participant to clarify the points that needed further explanation. This process of follow-up interviews ensured that we gathered accurate and detailed information from the participant, a doctoral student in Australia specializing in his field of study. With respect to methodology and positionality, we acknowledge that, as researchers, we are positioned as the participants' friends (insider perspective). This relationship influenced how we approached the study, aiming to create an open

and comfortable environment for participants to share their experiences and perspectives. Our friendship allowed for a more informal and relaxed interview setting, which helped build rapport and trust with the participants, facilitating more profound insights into their experiences as international doctoral students. However, we remained mindful of the potential biases this positionality could introduce and ensured that our interactions remained respectful and objective throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using two linguistic frameworks: transitivity analysis and language appraisal. These methods provided a detailed examination of the participant's language use in describing their intercultural experiences, offering insights into their cognitive and emotional processes during cultural adaptation. Transitivity Analysis: Transitivity analysis, rooted in systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), was employed to explore how the participants constructed meaning about their actions and experiences. By examining the types of processes (material, relational, mental) used by the participants, the analysis identified patterns in how they positioned themselves as active agents or passive recipients in intercultural interactions. Language Appraisal: The appraisal theory framework (Martin & White, 2005) was used to analyze the emotional and evaluative language in the participants' narratives. This approach allowed the researcher to examine how the participants expressed emotions, judgments, and attitudes toward their intercultural experiences, providing deeper insights into their subjective perceptions of intercultural competence. The data from the interviews were first transcribed and coded. A thematic analysis was then conducted to identify recurring themes related to intercultural competence, adaptation, and learning. Themes were identified through an iterative coding process in which the data were systematically reviewed, categorized, and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The combination of thematic and linguistic analyses enabled the researcher to create a comprehensive, multidimensional picture of the participants' intercultural development.

RESULTS

Initial Perceptions and Reality of Cultural Acceptance

The participant initially felt apprehensive about being accepted into the new community in Australia because of cultural differences and unfamiliarity. Despite these initial fears, he experienced a warm and welcoming environment, which contrasted with his expectations. This theme highlights the contrast between anticipated rejection and actual acceptance, reflecting the importance of open-mindedness and cultural empathy in intercultural interactions.

Australian culture is very open **[Security] [Relational]**, and I am comfortable with this **[Satisfaction] [Mental]**. Although when I first arrived in the country, I felt I might not be

accepted in my new community **[Disinclination] [Mental],** the reality was quite different **[Existential]**: I was warmly welcomed here **[Happiness] [Relational]**.

The analysis revealed that the participant navigates through feelings of uncertainty to a sense of comfort in a welcoming culture. The transitivity analysis highlights the processes involved in the speaker's experiences, whereas the language appraisal emphasizes the emotional responses and judgments that shape their perception of Australian culture. The text reflects a journey of adaptation and acceptance, highlighting the importance of interpersonal relations in cultural contexts.

Language Barriers and Adaptation

One major challenge the participant faced was adapting to Australian English, which differed significantly from their previous learning experiences in Indonesia. This struggle with language adaptation highlights the role of linguistic competence in intercultural communication and the difficulties that nonnative speakers may encounter when transitioning into an English-speaking country with its unique dialects and slang.

> My biggest challenge when I first studied in Australia was the language, which was very different from my experience of learning English during university or even in English courses in Indonesia **[Insecurity] [Relational]**. Moreover, despite the Australians being open, I found it challenging to engage with them **[Verbal]**, and I tended to interact more with fellow Indonesians **[Relational]** due to our shared cultural background and communication style **[Inclination]**. It meant that I needed a considerable amount of time to adapt to my new environment **[Insecurity] [Existential]**.

The analysis reveals a complex emotional landscape for speakers as they navigate their challenges adapting to Australia's new cultural environment. The language appraisal highlights the emotional impact of these experiences, showing a mix of frustration and recognition of Australians' cultural openness. The transitivity analysis elucidates the processes at play, focusing on the speaker's mental and material actions in the context of adaptation and engagement. In sum, the text reflects the importance of cultural background and communication styles in shaping interpersonal relationships in a new environment.

Preference for In-group Interactions

Despite the Australian community's openness, the participant preferred to engage more with fellow Indonesians due to shared cultural backgrounds and communication styles. This theme reflects the complexity of intercultural adaptation, where individuals may gravitate toward familiar cultural groups while navigating a new environment. This indicates the need for a supportive community to ease the cultural transition.

> I prefer interacting with fellow Indonesians **[Inclination] [Mental]** because we share cultural and communication similarities **[Security] [Relational]**; this means I needed a reasonably long adaptation process **[Existential]** to adjust to my new environment.

The analysis reveals a nuanced understanding of the participant's preferences and experiences regarding cultural adaptation. The language appraisal highlights a positive emotional connection with fellow Indonesians, stemming from shared cultural and communication traits, while also acknowledging the challenges of adapting to a new environment. The transitivity analysis clarifies the processes, emphasizing the speaker's actions, thoughts, and relational dynamics in his social interactions. In brief, the text reflects the importance of cultural similarities in fostering comfortable relationships and the inherent challenges of adapting to new cultural contexts.

Interconnection between Cultural and Religious Identity and Personal Academic Growth

Embarking on a PhD journey far from home is both an exciting and challenging experience. For an Indonesian Muslim student in Adelaide, Australia, pursuing academic success is intricately tied to maintaining cultural and spiritual identity. Balancing these aspects requires an intentional effort to stay grounded amidst the demands of higher education and the new cultural environment. Through engaging in meaningful activities and fostering connections within the local Muslim and Indonesian communities, this journey becomes a pursuit of knowledge and a path to personal growth and intercultural understanding.

> As a PhD student in Adelaide, Australia, my Indonesian Muslim identity guides my academic journey **[Security] [Mental]**. By avoiding distractions and managing my time effectively **[Material]**, I actively participate in *Kajian Islam* (Islamic Study) **[Inclination]** Adelaide **[Material]**, which fosters community connections and spiritual **[Behavioral]** growth **[Relational].** This activity allows me to balance my cultural and religious values **[Satisfaction] [Behavioral]**, particularly *Sirina Pacce* (Mutual Forgiveness) **[Behavioral]**, a core Makassar tradition. Sharing life experiences and values within this community deepens my understanding **[Happiness] [Verbal]** of both local and global perspectives **[Mental]**. My cultural identity supports my academic focus **[Relational]**, blending humility, passion, and artistry, while my Indonesian colleagues provide valuable encouragement along the way **[Satisfaction].**

The story portrays a harmonious interplay between personal values and academic responsibilities. Transitivity analysis reveals the prominence of material and relational processes, emphasizing purposeful actions and the relationships that reinforce identity and focus. Mental and verbal processes highlight reflection and interaction as critical elements of growth. From a language appraisal perspective, the narrative conveys a strong sense of security, satisfaction, and happiness derived from cultural and religious integration within the academic journey.

Professionalism and Interpersonal Relations:

He is not only studying in Australia but also working there. He exposed his working journey in Australia and how to immerse himself in Australian colleagues and culture simultaneously. The participant noticed a distinct separation between professional and personal matters in Australia, with Australians demonstrating a clear boundary between work and personal life. This observation illustrates a significant aspect of Australian professional culture, emphasizing the value placed on professionalism and the ability to compartmentalize different areas of life. This reflects the participant's growing understanding of Australia's cultural norms governing professional relationships.

> I began to adapt **[Mental] [Inclination]** to the local Australians when I got a very professional colleague **[Material] [Relational]** from the region. Australians know how to separate work and personal matters **[Behavioral] [Satisfaction]** So, work issues are not considered personal matters, and vice versa **[Relational]**.

The analysis highlights a positive perspective on the participant's adaptation to Australian culture, emphasizing the importance of professionalism and the ability to separate work from personal matters. The language appraisal reveals admiration for the colleague's professional demeanor and a positive emotional response to adapting to the local culture. The transitivity analysis clarifies the processes involved, showcasing the participant's actions and perceptions while emphasizing the importance of professional dynamics in fostering effective cultural interactions. The text reflects a constructive and appreciative approach to navigating new cultural environments.

Importance of Intercultural Competence

The participant acknowledged that intercultural competence is crucial in a diverse country like Australia. He recognized the dynamic interplay of different cultures and the necessity of understanding and respecting this diversity. This theme emphasizes the participant's realization that intercultural competence goes beyond mere tolerance, requiring active engagement and mutual respect.

> Furthermore, intercultural competence is essential **[Relational] [Security]** because Australia is a diverse country **[Existential]**, and we need to understand **[Mental] [Inclination]** that is the dynamic we require **[Relational]** for mutual dependence **[Security]**.

The analysis highlights the strong emphasis on the importance of intercultural competence in navigating Australia's diverse cultural landscape. The language appraisal reveals a positive stance towards the necessity of this competence and the value of understanding diversity for fostering mutual dependence. The transitivity analysis clarifies the processes involved, showcasing the relational and mental processes that underscore the text's arguments. In brief, his statement

conveys a constructive perspective on the role of intercultural competence in promoting collaboration and understanding in a multicultural society.

Moral and Ethical Values

The participant noted a difference in the value system between Indonesia and Australia, highlighting the Australian emphasis on honesty, professionalism, and ethical behavior. This realization came from experiences where ethical standards were prioritized over religious dogma, pointing to a cultural distinction in the foundation of moral behavior. The participant's reflection on these values reveals a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of intercultural competence.

> Therefore, honesty is the primary or foundational aspect **[Relational] [Security]**. Moral aspects are more important than cognitive aspects **[Relational]**. Especially as a Muslim, I need to share **[Mental] [Inclination]** a peaceful action **[Material] [Happiness]** of my Muslim identity.

The analysis strongly endorses honesty as a foundational moral value, positioning Muslim identity to share peace as more significant than cognitive considerations. The language appraisal reflects a positive emotional and ethical stance towards honesty and moral behavior, while the transitivity analysis clarifies the relational and mental processes involved in the argument. Overall, the text presents a compelling perspective on prioritizing moral values, framing honesty as essential for ethical conduct.

Nonjudgmental Perspective and Respect for Diversity

The participant learned to appreciate that everyone has their own perspective and should not judge others based on cultural norms, religion, or ethnicity. Instead, he emphasized evaluating people on the basis of their skills and competencies. This theme underscores an essential aspect of intercultural competence—developing a nonjudgmental and inclusive mindset that respects individual differences and focuses on merit rather than cultural or personal background.

> We cannot make positive or negative judgments **[Mental]** regarding their habits because these are related to the norms present in Australia **[Relational]**. Our perspective on ourselves needs to change **[Mental] [Inclination]** because everyone has their own viewpoint on things **[Existential]**; therefore, what is assessed is the individual's ability or skills **[Material]**, not their ethnic background, nationality, or religion **[Security]**.

The analysis highlights a respectful and reflective approach to understanding cultural differences and individual abilities. Language appraisal reveals a positive attitude toward inclusivity and the importance of evaluating people based on their skills rather than their backgrounds. The transitivity analysis clarifies the relationships and processes involved, emphasizing the collective

responsibility to change perspectives. In conclusion, the text promotes an understanding of diversity through a lens of respect and appreciation for individual merit.

Personal Growth and Transformation

The narrative indicates a transformative journey in which the participant's perspective shifted from initial uncertainty and preference for in-group interaction to a more nuanced understanding of intercultural dynamics. This theme reflects personal growth and the development of a more adaptable mindset, as the participant navigated various challenges and learned to integrate into the diverse Australian society.

> When I tried to engage **[Behavioral]** with Australians **[Material]**, even though they were open **[Happiness]**, I tended to prefer interacting with fellow Indonesians **[Mental]** **[Inclination]** because we shared cultural and communication similarities **[Relational]**; this meant I needed quite a long adaptation process **[Satisfaction]** to my new environment.

The analysis reveals a nuanced perspective on the experience of engaging with a new culture. The language appraisal highlights a combination of comfort, reflection, and appreciation for cultural similarities while recognizing adaptation challenges. The transitivity analysis clarifies the relationships and processes at play, showcasing the speaker's proactive efforts in social engagement and their cognitive reflections on cultural connections. In short, the narration captures the intricate dynamics of cultural adaptation and personal preference within cross-cultural interactions.

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals the participants' emotional journeys as they navigate feelings of insecurity while gradually embracing the openness of Australian culture. This transition highlights personal growth and underscores the crucial role of emotional responses in shaping intercultural competence. The participant's initial discomfort transformed into a sense of belonging, demonstrating how interpersonal relationships significantly influence cultural adaptation. In addition, the importance of the cultural context is evident, as the participant finds comfort in shared cultural values are consistent with those of their fellow Indonesians, highlighting how familiarity can facilitate connections in multicultural environments.

Moreover, the participant's admiration for a colleague's professionalism emphasizes the necessity of adapting to local cultural norms, suggesting that understanding workplace dynamics fosters effective intercultural interactions. This finding aligns with that of Pastena et al. (2022), who argue that "plurilingualism and previous intercultural experiences contribute to the development of intercultural sensitivity and adaptation, particularly at the

beginning of new intercultural encounters," underscoring the role of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in facilitating smoother transitions in new environments. The analysis highlights the importance of intercultural competence in navigating Australia's diverse landscape, framing it as a vital skill for collaboration.

A significant theme is prioritizing honesty as a foundational moral value, reflecting the belief that ethical conduct is essential for successful intercultural relationships, especially expressing a Muslim identity to showcase peaceful action. The findings encourage a respectful evaluation of individuals based on their skills rather than their backgrounds, promoting inclusivity and an appreciation for diversity. Overall, the analysis captures the complexities of cultural adaptation, illustrating the proactive engagement and reflective thought processes, and reinforcing the importance of developing intercultural competence in fostering understanding and collaboration in a multicultural world.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study have several implications for the development of intercultural competence, particularly in diverse educational and professional settings. First, the participant's transformative journey underscores the need for emotional support systems to facilitate smoother cultural adaptation processes. Academic institutions and workplaces can benefit from structured programs that promote emotional well-being and resilience, helping individuals navigate the initial insecurities associated with adapting to new cultural environments. Second, the study highlights the importance of fostering environments that value shared cultural experiences and encourage intercultural interactions. Institutions can create spaces celebrating cultural diversity, providing opportunities for individuals to connect over shared values and experiences. It can help ease the transition for newcomers and foster a sense of community and belonging. The development of transcultural competence involves three key elements: cultivating awareness, showing respect, and bridging transcultural differences (Astley, 2024). Moreover, the admiration for local professionalism observed in the study suggests that introducing training programs that highlight local cultural norms and workplace expectations can be instrumental in enhancing intercultural competence. By fostering intercultural competence, the transition for newcomers can be significantly eased, helping to build a sense of community and belonging. This study highlights local professionalism's importance and how tailored training programs, which emphasize cultural norms and workplace expectations, can significantly enhance intercultural competence. Such initiatives prepare individuals to navigate diverse cultural settings and promote the positive representation of Muslim identity in the academic and professional spheres, empowering students to excel in both personal and professional environments. However, the small sample size, which focused on a single participant, is a significant limitation of this study. While the insights gained offer a deep understanding of the participant's experiences, the findings cannot

be generalized to a larger group of international doctoral students. Future research will aim to expand the sample size, incorporating a more diverse range of participants to provide a broader analysis of the varying experiences of international students in Australia. This approach helps mitigate the biases introduced by the small sample size.

Finally, this case study offers valuable insights into the broader discourse on intercultural competence by demonstrating how proactive engagement and reflective thinking are crucial for successful cultural adaptation. It advocates for educational and professional settings to adopt a holistic approach that encourages individuals to reflect on their intercultural experiences, thus deepening their understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. By promoting respectful and appreciative engagement with diverse cultural experiences, the findings suggest that intercultural competence is beneficial and essential for fostering collaboration and mutual understanding in today's multicultural world. Hastowohadi and Ma'rifatulloh (2025) stated that promoting cultural inclusivity and diversity is essential, as creating a welcoming environment helps cultivate a sense of belonging. This study highlights how identity fosters intercultural understanding, strategies for balancing academic and cultural values, and the role of reflection, community engagement, and support systems in developing intercultural competence. It contributes to global discussions on how international students adapt and maintain their cultural identity in diverse settings.

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