

Analysis of factors affecting intercultural communication awareness in generation Z

Wahdania

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Muh. Fauzi Ramadhan

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Lely Novia

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: wahdania151205@gmail.com

Abstract

Intercultural communication awareness is a crucial competence for Generation Z in navigating an increasingly complex global environment. This study aims to analyze the factors affecting intercultural communication awareness among Generation Z, focusing on the intensity of cross-cultural interactions, communication comfort, cultural literacy, and the use of social media. A quantitative approach was used, employing a survey method involving over 100 university students from various institutions in Makassar. Data were collected through an online questionnaire covering ten key indicators. The findings reveal that most respondents frequently interact with individuals from different cultures and actively use social media to explore foreign cultures. Furthermore, they display a positive attitude in adapting their communication style and showing respect for cultural differences. However, challenges remain in avoiding cultural stereotypes and actively engaging in discussions about intercultural issues. The study concludes that exposure to different cultures through digital media and social interaction significantly enhances intercultural communication awareness. Multicultural education is needed to strengthen cross-cultural understanding and tolerance among Generation Z.

Abstrak

Kesadaran komunikasi antarbudaya menjadi kemampuan penting yang harus dimiliki oleh Generasi Z dalam menghadapi era globalisasi yang semakin kompleks. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi kesadaran komunikasi antarbudaya pada Generasi Z, dengan fokus pada intensitas interaksi lintas budaya, kenyamanan berkomunikasi, literasi budaya, serta pemanfaatan media sosial. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini, dengan metode survei terhadap lebih dari 100 mahasiswa dari berbagai universitas di Makassar. Data diperoleh melalui kuesioner daring yang terdiri dari sepuluh indikator utama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar responden memiliki tingkat interaksi lintas budaya yang cukup tinggi dan secara aktif menggunakan media sosial untuk mengeksplorasi

budaya asing. Selain itu, mereka juga menunjukkan sikap positif dalam menyesuaikan gaya komunikasi dan menghargai perbedaan nilai budaya. Meskipun demikian, masih ditemukan tantangan dalam menghindari stereotip budaya dan dalam pembahasan isu lintas budaya secara aktif. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa paparan budaya asing melalui media digital dan interaksi sosial menjadi faktor utama dalam meningkatkan kesadaran komunikasi antarbudaya. Diperlukan dukungan pendidikan multikultural untuk memperkuat pemahaman dan toleransi lintas budaya di kalangan Generasi Z.

Keywords: intercultural communication, Generation Z, social media, cultural literacy, multicultural education

Introduction

In the 21st century, globalization has evolved from a mere economic phenomenon into a deeply rooted social, cultural, and technological reality that affects every aspect of human life. One of the most visible consequences of globalization is the increasing interaction among individuals from vastly different cultural backgrounds. The advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs)—especially the internet, social media, and real-time communication platforms—has dramatically reshaped the way people across the world connect and engage with one another. The physical borders that once limited cultural encounters have become increasingly irrelevant, giving rise to a highly interconnected global community where intercultural communication is no longer optional, but essential for coexistence and collaboration.

In this rapidly transforming world, the importance of intercultural communication skills has intensified. It is no longer confined to international diplomats, business professionals, or travelers. Instead, it has become a crucial life skill for students, educators, employees, and citizens alike. Individuals must be able to interact, communicate, and collaborate with people who think, speak, and behave differently—often in subtle ways that require sensitivity, reflection, and adaptability. This increasing multicultural exposure demands not only the ability to understand other cultures intellectually, but also to engage with them respectfully and meaningfully on an emotional and behavioral level.

Against this backdrop, Generation Z—defined in this study as individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s—emerges as a unique generation characterized by unprecedented levels of digital exposure and cultural interconnectivity. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z has grown up with constant access to the internet, mobile technology, and global media. They are often referred to as “digital natives,” who have not only grown accustomed to receiving information quickly, but also expect social and cultural diversity to be part of their daily digital experiences. With platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, and even online gaming communities, Generation Z routinely encounters cultural products, values, and communication styles from all over the world.

This constant exposure positions Generation Z as a potentially powerful force in promoting global understanding and reducing cultural prejudice. However, their immersion in digital media does not automatically guarantee intercultural competence. Exposure must be accompanied by awareness, critical thinking, empathy, and behavioral adaptability to be truly

effective in fostering positive intercultural relationships. Hence, intercultural communication awareness—defined as an individual’s capacity to perceive, understand, and appropriately respond to cultural differences—is a key indicator of how well this generation is equipped to navigate a globalized society (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Dearnorff, 2006).

Several previous studies have explored intercultural competence in Generation Z. For instance, *Advancing Intercultural Competence in Higher Education* focused on Japanese Generation Z students and emphasized the role of modernized educational models and technological tools in promoting intercultural exchange (Yamada, 2025). Meanwhile, *Gaya Bahasa Gen Z dalam Komunikasi Antar Budaya* examined the role of social media—such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter—in shaping intercultural communication awareness among youth. Another study, *Kesadaran Multikultural Generasi Z dan Implikasinya pada Pendidikan*, mapped the profile of multicultural awareness among university students in Yogyakarta without delving into the underlying factors (Efianingrum, Maryani, Sukardi, Hanum & Dwiningrum, 2022). Similarly, *The Role of Cross-Cultural Communication to Balance the Generation Gap in Indonesia* highlighted the importance of cross-generational communication in the broader societal context, while *Pengaruh Globalisasi terhadap Perubahan Pola Komunikasi Antar Budaya pada Generasi Z* addressed the impact of globalization on changing communication patterns (Salsabila, Widiyanarti, Ashari, Zahra, & Fadhilah, 2024).

While these studies provide valuable insights, most of them are either descriptive in nature, focused on specific tools (like social media or educational technology), or centered in different geographical or cultural settings. This current study builds upon these foundations by offering a more analytical and localized perspective. Specifically, it investigates the key factors that influence intercultural communication awareness among Generation Z university students in Makassar—a major educational and cultural hub in eastern Indonesia. By analyzing factors such as intercultural interaction frequency, communication comfort, cultural knowledge-seeking behavior, communication style adaptation, and the use of digital media, this study seeks to determine which of these has the most dominant impact.

In doing so, the research provides a more holistic and comparative analysis that not only identifies influential variables but also examines their relative significance. Unlike prior research that tends to focus on isolated tools or general trends, this study contributes a deeper understanding of the lived intercultural experiences of young Indonesians in a pluralistic, digitized environment.

Method

This study employed a quantitative research approach, specifically utilizing the survey method, to systematically examine the factors influencing intercultural communication awareness among Generation Z university students in Makassar. The decision to adopt a quantitative methodology was grounded in the objective to obtain measurable and generalizable data concerning students’ perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes toward intercultural communication. Quantitative methods enable the use of structured instruments to capture numeric data, allowing for statistical analysis that can reveal patterns, relationships, and trends

across a broad population sample.

The survey method was chosen for its efficiency in collecting standardized information from a large number of respondents within a relatively short period. Surveys are particularly suitable when the research seeks to identify prevalent opinions, behavioral trends, and relationships among predefined variables (Creswell, 2014). Given the dispersed nature of the target population and the constraints posed by time and resources, an online survey platform was determined to be the most practical and accessible means of data collection.

The target population for this study consisted of undergraduate and graduate university students across diverse faculties and educational institutions in Makassar. This demographic was selected intentionally because university students represent a critical segment of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012), characterized by high levels of digital literacy and active engagement in multicultural settings. They are among the most likely age group to encounter intercultural experiences both physically (through university activities and social environments) and virtually (through social media and global networks).

A purposive sampling technique was employed in this study, with the intention of selecting participants who met specific inclusion criteria to ensure the relevance, accuracy, and representativeness of the data collected. The first criterion required that participants be between the ages of 18 and 24, corresponding to the age range typically associated with Generation Z. This age group was chosen because it represents individuals who have grown up in a digitally connected world and are likely to have frequent exposure to diverse cultural content. Secondly, participants were required to be actively enrolled in a higher education institution. This condition was established to ensure that respondents had access to academic and social environments that are generally more conducive to intercultural interactions, such as multicultural classrooms, international programs, or student exchange opportunities. The third criterion stipulated that participants must be active users of digital platforms that facilitate intercultural communication. This included platforms such as social media, online learning environments, and international forums, which are widely used by Generation Z to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds. These targeted criteria allowed the research to focus on individuals who were not only demographically aligned with the study's objective but also contextually relevant to the phenomenon being investigated.

A total of more than 100 valid responses were obtained and included in the final analysis. While purposive sampling limits the generalizability of the results to all Indonesian youth, it ensures that the sample was relevant and directly aligned with the research objectives.

Data collection was conducted through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, a user-friendly and accessible platform. This method allowed for broad geographic coverage, reaching students from various cities and regions in South Sulawesi without incurring high logistical costs. The questionnaire was designed in the Indonesian language to maximize clarity, comprehension, and cultural relevance for participants.

The questionnaire instrument was carefully developed based on a comprehensive review of the existing literature on intercultural communication awareness (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Deardorff, 2006) and was thoughtfully adapted to the Indonesian sociocultural context to ensure

relevance and clarity for respondents. The instrument consisted of ten close-ended items, each designed to measure a specific dimension of intercultural competence. These dimensions included the frequency of interaction with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, which reflects the extent of respondents' exposure to intercultural settings. It also measured students' comfort and confidence in cross-cultural communication situations, as an indicator of their affective readiness. Another key aspect captured was the effort to seek and acquire knowledge about other cultures, reflecting the respondent's level of cultural literacy. Additionally, the instrument assessed the use of digital media and social platforms as tools for cultural exploration, recognizing the influential role of technology in shaping intercultural perceptions. Lastly, the questionnaire explored respondents' adaptability in communication, particularly their sensitivity to differing cultural norms and their conscious efforts to avoid stereotypes during intercultural interactions. Collectively, these items aimed to provide a holistic measurement of intercultural communication awareness among Generation Z university students.

Each item employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Never" (1) to "Very Often" (5), enabling the measurement of both the occurrence and intensity of participants' intercultural practices and attitudes.

Prior to mass distribution, the instrument underwent a validation process involving expert reviewers—academicians specializing in communication, education, and cultural studies—who evaluated the content validity, wording clarity, and relevance of each item. Feedback from experts was incorporated to refine the questionnaire for greater accuracy and cultural sensitivity.

Efforts were made to address potential biases, such as social desirability bias, by ensuring participant anonymity and emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers in the survey instructions. Ethical considerations were adhered to, with voluntary participation, informed consent, and data confidentiality strictly maintained.

Overall, the methodological framework adopted in this study allowed for efficient, reliable, and valid data collection and analysis, generating insightful findings regarding the state of intercultural communication awareness among Makassar Generation Z students. By combining rigorous sampling procedures, validated instruments, and comprehensive data analysis techniques, the study contributes credible empirical evidence to the field of intercultural communication studies in the Indonesian context.

Finding dan Discussion

Findings

Research Question I: How often do you interact with individuals from different cultures (in person or online)?

One of the key indicators analyzed in this study was the frequency of interaction with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, both in person and online. This indicator is essential in evaluating the exposure level and openness of Generation Z toward intercultural

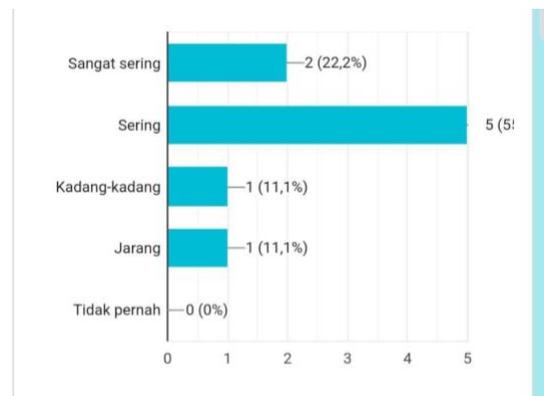
environments.

The survey data revealed that the majority of respondents (55.6%) stated that they *often* interact with individuals from different cultures. Meanwhile, 22.2% reported interacting *very often*. A smaller portion of respondents selected *sometimes* (11.1%) and *rarely* (11.1%). Notably, no respondents selected *never* as their answer, indicating a baseline of intercultural contact across all participants.

This result reflects a relatively high level of cross-cultural engagement, both in daily social settings and digital platforms such as social media, online communities, or academic collaborations.

Diagram 1

Percentage of Times They Interact with Individuals from Different Cultures (Both in Person or Online)



These findings support the idea that Generation Z, being digital natives, has substantial opportunities to engage in multicultural experiences. However, the depth and quality of these interactions need further exploration, especially when analyzing the development of intercultural sensitivity and adaptability.

Research Question 2: I feel comfortable talking to people from different cultural backgrounds.

In addition to interaction frequency, the study examined communication comfort when engaging with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Comfort is considered an important component of intercultural competence, as it reflects an individual's openness and adaptability during intercultural encounters.

Based on the responses from 100 participants, 44.4% of respondents indicated that they *very often* feel comfortable speaking with individuals from different cultures, while 22.2% selected *often*. Meanwhile, 33.3% of respondents reported feeling *sometimes* comfortable in such interactions. No participants selected *rarely* or *never*, suggesting a generally positive attitude and willingness to engage in cross-cultural communication.

Diagram 2

Perception of Comfort When Speaking with People from Different Cultural Background

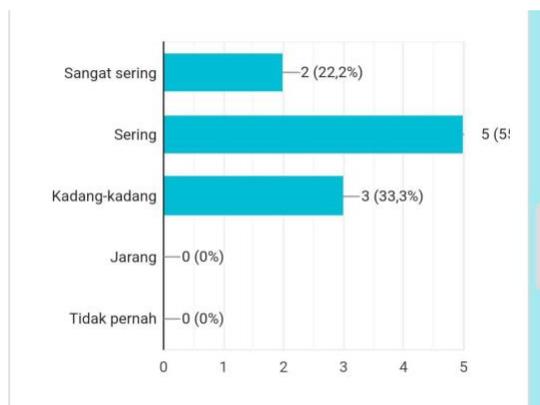


This result illustrates that most Generation Z students feel at ease when communicating across cultures, likely supported by their frequent exposure to diverse online and academic environments.

Research Question 3: I try to understand how people from other cultures think.

The next indicator measured in this study was effort to understand other cultures' ways of thinking, a reflective and cognitive aspect of intercultural communication. Among the 100 respondents, 55.6% indicated that they *often* try to understand the perspectives of people from other cultures, followed by 33.3% who said *sometimes*. Only 22.2% reported doing so *very often*, and none selected *rarely* or *never*.

Diagram 3.
Frequency of Effort to Understand Others' Cultural Perspectives



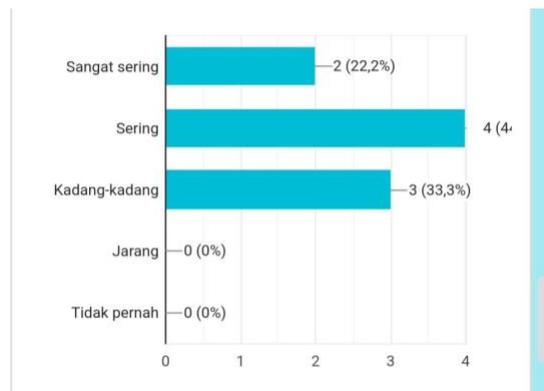
These findings suggest that while students engage with different cultures, the cognitive effort to *actively understand* diverse perspectives is not yet consistently at the highest level. This may indicate a gap between *exposure* and *internalization*—students interact across cultures but may not always engage in critical reflection, which is key to deep intercultural awareness (Byram, 1997).

Research Question 4: I seek or follow information about other cultures.

This indicator focuses on students' initiative in actively searching for or following

information about different cultures—a behavioral aspect of intercultural communication. Among the 100 respondents, 44.4% reported that they often seek or follow information about other cultures, while 33.3% said they do so sometimes. Only 22.2% reported doing so very often, and none selected rarely or never.

Diagram 4.
Frequency of Effort to Seek Information About Other Cultures



These results indicate that while students are somewhat proactive in learning about different cultures, there is still room to enhance their frequency of engagement. The relatively low number of students who reported seeking information *very often* may reflect a limited habit of continuous cultural exploration. This suggests a potential need to encourage more consistent and intentional efforts in accessing cultural knowledge, which plays an important role in fostering intercultural competence (Byram, 1997).

Research Question 5: I adjust my communication style when speaking with people from different cultures.

This indicator evaluates students' adaptability in intercultural communication, particularly in modifying one's communication approach to align with cultural differences. Out of 100 respondents, 66.7% reported that they often adjust their communication style when interacting with people from different cultures. 33.3% stated they do so sometimes, while no one selected very often, rarely, or never.

Diagram 5.
Frequency of Adjusting Communication Style with People from Other Cultures



These findings indicate that most students are aware of the importance of adapting their communication styles in intercultural settings. However, the absence of responses for “very

often” may suggest that this skill is practiced but not yet internalized or applied consistently in all intercultural interactions.

Research Question 6: I avoid using stereotypes when speaking with people from other cultures.

This indicator measures the extent to which students consciously avoid stereotypical assumptions in intercultural dialogue. Among 100 respondents, 66.7% said they often avoid using stereotypes, while 11.1% selected sometimes, rarely, and never respectively.

Diagram 6.
Frequency of Avoiding Stereotypes in Intercultural Communication

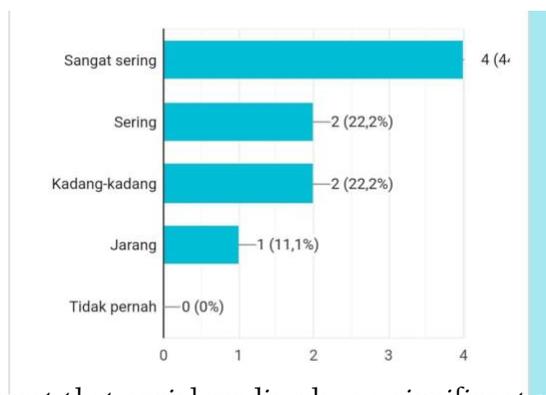


These results reveal a positive tendency toward stereotype avoidance, though the presence of some responses in the “rarely” and “never” categories is concerning. This underscores the need for greater awareness and education on the negative effects of stereotypes in cross-cultural communication.

Research Question 7: I use social media to learn about foreign cultures.

This question assesses how frequently students engage with digital platforms to explore different cultural contexts. Out of 100 respondents, 44.4% indicated they do so very often, 22.2% said often, another 22.2% selected sometimes, and 11.1% reported doing so rarely. No one selected never.

Diagram 7.
Frequency of Using Social Media to Learn About Other Cultures



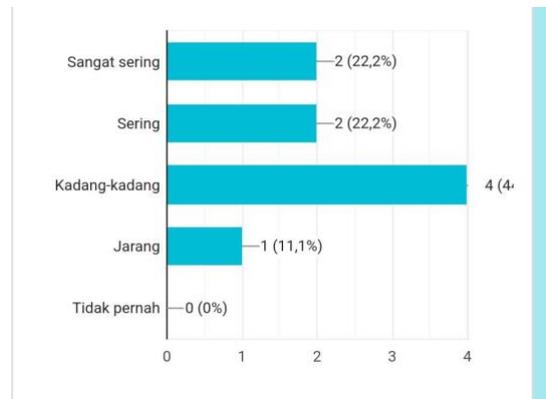
These findings suggest that social media plays a significant role in cultural learning for students. However, the varied levels of engagement indicate that while some students are highly

proactive, others may not yet fully leverage digital platforms for intercultural knowledge.

Research Question 8: I discuss cross-cultural issues with friends or in class.

This indicator measures students' involvement in intercultural dialogue through academic or social discussions. From 100 respondents, 44.4% reported that they sometimes engage in such discussions. Both very often and often were chosen by 22.2%, while 11.1% selected rarely. None selected never.

Diagram 8.
Frequency of Discussing Cross-Cultural Issues with Friends or in Class

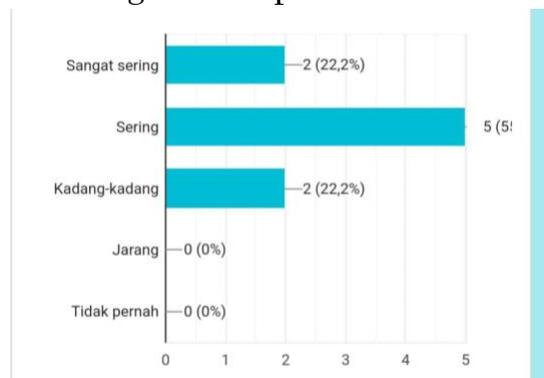


The data reveals moderate engagement in discussing cultural topics. While some students actively participate, a significant portion still engages only occasionally, highlighting the potential for more structured intercultural discussion in educational environments.

Research Question 9: I make friends or socialize with people from different countries or regions.

This indicator explores students' willingness and frequency in establishing interpersonal connections with individuals from diverse cultural or regional backgrounds. Out of 100 respondents, 50% reported that they often socialize with people from different countries or regions. 21.7% answered very often, and another 21.7% selected sometimes. Notably, no respondents chose rarely or never.

Diagram 9.
Frequency of Socializing with People from Other Countries or Regions



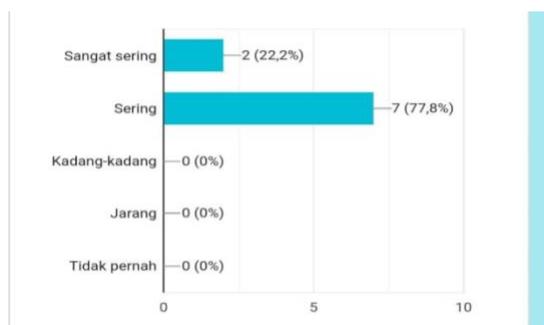
These findings suggest a positive inclination toward cross-cultural interaction, with most students engaging frequently in intercultural friendships. The absence of responses in the

lower frequency categories also indicates a generally open and inclusive social attitude among the participants.

Research Question 10: I show respect for customs or values from other cultures.

This indicator assesses students' intercultural sensitivity, particularly their ability to acknowledge and respect cultural differences in values and traditions. Among the 100 respondents, 77.5% stated that they often show respect for other cultures' customs or values, while 22.5% reported doing so very often. No responses were recorded for sometimes, rarely, or never.

Diagram 10.
Frequency of Showing Respect for Other Cultural Customs or Values



The data demonstrates a high level of cultural awareness and respect among students. The fact that all respondents selected the top two categories reflects a strong commitment to intercultural harmony and the development of global citizenship values.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight several important aspects of intercultural communication awareness among Generation Z, particularly within the context of Makassar university students. These results not only corroborate but also extend existing theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence in the field of intercultural communication. The convergence of digital exposure and intercultural engagement among Generation Z necessitates a nuanced understanding of how awareness, attitudes, and competencies are formed in today's globalized environment.

Firstly, the frequent interaction of students with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, both online and offline, reinforces the concept that Generation Z, often referred to as digital natives, is inherently more exposed to a variety of cultural stimuli compared to previous generations (Prensky, 2001). This supports Chen and Starosta's (2000) intercultural sensitivity model, which posits that repeated intercultural encounters facilitate the development of empathy, flexibility, and the ability to navigate cultural differences. The pervasive role of social media platforms—such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube—as sources of informal learning further affirms Sorrells' (2015) assertion that media-driven environments play a crucial role in shaping intercultural competence outside traditional educational structures.

Furthermore, the sense of comfort reported by students when communicating across

cultural boundaries reflects a positive attitudinal component emphasized in Deardorff's (2006) intercultural competence framework. According to Deardorff, attitudes such as openness, curiosity, respect, and discovery are foundational pillars for effective and appropriate intercultural engagement. The adaptability of communication styles exhibited by many respondents also resonates with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, where behavioral flexibility and the ability to modify language and interaction strategies are seen as indicators of advanced intercultural proficiency.

However, despite these encouraging signs, the study also reveals notable inconsistencies and challenges. Specifically, there is a visible gap in students' efforts to actively avoid cultural stereotyping and to engage in deeper, critical discussions about cultural differences. This limitation echoes the warnings highlighted by Gudykunst (2004), who argues that simple exposure to cultural differences does not automatically lead to profound intercultural understanding. Without deliberate efforts to critically reflect on intercultural experiences, students risk remaining at a superficial level of awareness, characterized by tokenism or oversimplified views of complex cultural realities.

Moreover, the findings provide insight into the limitations of passive cultural exposure. Although digital media facilitates widespread access to diverse content, it does not inherently cultivate critical thinking, empathy, or intercultural ethical reasoning unless intentionally integrated with reflective educational practices. This is consistent with Lee's (2012) findings, which emphasize the indispensable role of formal multicultural education in nurturing critical consciousness and in dismantling ingrained cultural biases. Without structured guidance, digital exposure alone may even reinforce stereotypes through selective and algorithm-driven media consumption patterns.

In terms of theoretical implications, the study suggests that while foundational models of intercultural competence (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 2000; Deardorff, 2006; Byram, 1997) remain robust and applicable, they require adaptations to reflect the realities of the digital age. Notably, digital literacy should be explicitly recognized as a vital dimension influencing the development of intercultural awareness among younger generations. The intersection of online engagement and cultural learning indicates the emergence of a hybrid model of intercultural competence—one that synthesizes both virtual and real-world intercultural experiences. Future theoretical models must account for the unique ways digital interactions mediate cultural perceptions, identities, and attitudes.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study carry significant implications for higher education institutions. Universities cannot rely solely on students' digital encounters to foster intercultural competence. Instead, there is an urgent need to proactively design educational experiences that intentionally integrate multicultural and intercultural elements throughout the academic curriculum. This can be achieved by embedding multicultural case studies, global issues, and comparative cultural analyses across various disciplines, ensuring that students are exposed to diverse perspectives within their field of study.

Furthermore, institutions should facilitate student exchange programs, virtual international collaborations, and joint academic projects involving culturally diverse groups to

provide direct, immersive experiences that promote meaningful intercultural engagement. In addition, organizing structured intercultural dialogues, workshops, and cultural immersion programs can help students develop empathy, self-awareness, and critical reflection. Finally, incorporating reflective assignments that prompt students to examine and question their own cultural assumptions and biases is essential in fostering deeper intercultural awareness and sensitivity. These strategies, when implemented collectively and consistently, can significantly enhance the development of intercultural competence in Generation Z students and prepare them for active participation in a globalized world. Such interventions are crucial not only for preparing students to be global citizens but also for equipping them with the competencies required for effective cross-cultural collaboration in increasingly diverse professional environments, both within Indonesia and internationally.

Finally, this study makes a meaningful contribution to the academic conversation on intercultural communication by offering a contextualized understanding of how Generation Z in a non-Western multicultural society experiences, interprets, and navigates intercultural relationships. It emphasizes that while globalization and technological access have increased opportunities for intercultural exposure, intentional educational support remains essential in transforming exposure into genuine intercultural competence.

In conclusion, the study highlights both the promising potentials and the ongoing challenges faced by educators, policymakers, and institutions in fostering intercultural awareness in a digital and globalized world. As societies continue to become more interconnected, there is a critical need to cultivate a generation that not only appreciates cultural diversity at a superficial level but engages with it thoughtfully, ethically, and empathetically.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the factors influencing intercultural communication awareness among Generation Z university students in Makassar, Indonesia. As stated in the *Introduction*, it was hypothesized that frequent intercultural exposure, high digital literacy, and a generally open attitude toward diversity would contribute to shaping a moderate to high level of intercultural awareness among young people. The findings discussed in the *Findings and Discussion* section confirmed these assumptions, demonstrating that most respondents frequently engage in interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds—either directly or through digital means—and show a relatively strong sense of comfort when navigating intercultural settings. Moreover, their active use of digital platforms such as social media for cultural exploration reinforces the idea that technological immersion plays a crucial role in shaping intercultural perspectives for this generation.

However, despite these promising indicators, the study also revealed some critical limitations in the respondents' intercultural competence. Specifically, there remains inconsistency in efforts to actively avoid stereotyping and in the willingness to initiate or participate in meaningful cross-cultural dialogues. These findings suggest that while Generation Z may be digitally connected and culturally exposed, this exposure does not automatically translate into deep intercultural understanding. In other words, technological access and surface-

level interaction with cultural diversity are not sufficient to foster comprehensive intercultural communication skills. What is lacking is the depth of reflection, critical thinking, and structured support that are necessary for the internalization of intercultural values and perspectives.

The substantial value of this study lies in its reaffirmation that intercultural communication awareness is not merely the result of increased exposure to global cultures, but rather a dynamic construct that requires deliberate cultivation through education, experience, and guided interaction. The findings underscore the need for educational institutions, particularly universities, to move beyond informal exposure and adopt a more structured and intentional approach to multicultural learning. This can include the integration of intercultural communication modules into the curriculum, the facilitation of student exchange programs, the creation of intercultural discussion forums, and the inclusion of reflection-based assignments aimed at deepening cultural empathy and awareness.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the research contributes to the growing body of knowledge surrounding intercultural communication competence in non-Western contexts, particularly among digitally native populations in the Global South. Practically, it provides a foundation for educators, curriculum developers, and policy makers to design learning environments that not only acknowledge but also actively address the gaps in intercultural understanding. Institutions of higher learning are in a unique position to equip students with the tools necessary to navigate a diverse and interconnected world—not just as passive observers of culture, but as thoughtful and competent communicators across boundaries.

Looking ahead, future research could build upon the current study by exploring intercultural communication awareness in more varied demographic groups, such as non-student youth, adult learners, or professionals working in multicultural industries. This would help determine whether the patterns identified in this study are unique to university students or are reflective of broader generational trends. Additionally, longitudinal studies would be valuable to track how intercultural competence develops over time with sustained exposure and formal education. Incorporating qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, narrative analysis, or focus group discussions could further enrich the understanding of how individuals personally interpret and navigate intercultural encounters.

Ultimately, fostering intercultural communication awareness in Generation Z is not only a matter of academic interest, but also a societal imperative. In a world increasingly marked by cultural fluidity and global collaboration, equipping young people with the mindset, skills, and empathy to engage meaningfully across differences is essential for building inclusive, respectful, and cooperative communities—both locally and globally.

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