

**Barriers and Cross Cultural Communication Challenges: The Insights
Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) 2022 Awardees
at Phoenix Academy**

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ABSTRACT

This article was written with the purpose of investigating the cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) for Vocational Students 2022 awardees at Phoenix Academy during their time studying in Perth, Australia, as well as their solutions to overcome said barriers. Aligned with the research's objectives and subjects, the method used in conducting this research is the qualitative method. The writer conducted a series of in-depth interviews with 14 (fourteen) IISMA for Vocational Students 2022 awardees at Phoenix Academy. The writer found the six main barriers they had been subjected to during their stay based on the theory by Kiss (2005): different communication styles, different attitudes towards conflicts, different approaches to completing tasks, different decision-making styles, different attitudes towards disclosure, and different approaches to knowing. The writer concluded that their strategies to overcome each barrier varied according to the awardees' personal approach and causes. Thorough analysis of the data was performed by dissecting the awardees' experiences, interpreting their opinions, and correlating them with the relevant theory. It is aimed for this article to be able to aid the future batches of IISMA awardees or recipients of other international programs.

Key words: Barriers; Cross Cultural Communication; Culture Shock; IISMA

INTRODUCTION

Countries are competing to produce the most proficient labour force to live up to international standards. Consequently, this prompts a need for students to develop the ability to communicate across cultures, leading the government to devise the program Indonesian International Students Mobility Awards (IISMA). However, no shortage of students struggled to convey their thoughts and adapt due to differing cultural values held, unfamiliar environment, and other factors which served as their setbacks from communicating with members of other cultures (IISMA, 2021). According to Soemantri (2019), these barriers reportedly affect livelihood and incite lack of confidence to participate in class. For preventative purposes, this article aims to determine the cross-cultural communication barriers faced by IISMA for Vocational Students 2022 awardees at Phoenix Academy, as well as the strategies they took to mitigate the issues.

That brings forth the question: what exactly is cross-cultural communication barrier? Cross-cultural barriers are defined as ideas, concepts, or behaviors which differ from one culture to another (Kim, 2001). These barriers often take place during a communication process (LEOTESCU, 2023) and possess the potential to cause misunderstanding, thereby hindering the conveying of a message or information. Therefore, the writer defines cross-cultural communication barrier as the obstruction which prevents people of different cultures from exchanging information (Ardianto et al., 2025).

According to Putri (2024), there are six types of cross-cultural communication barriers, namely different attitudes towards conflicts, different approaches to completing tasks, different decision-making styles, different attitudes towards disclosure, and different approaches to knowing; with each barrier having multiple causes. This theory serves as the foundation to categories the barriers found in the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-Cultural Communication: Definition and Scope

Cross-cultural communication refers to the process by which individuals from different cultural backgrounds exchange information and meaning. It involves verbal and non-verbal communication shaped by each individual's cultural values, beliefs, behaviours, and worldviews. According to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy (2017), cross-cultural communication is “the interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event.” Communication challenges often arise in intercultural settings due to differing cultural norms regarding politeness, power distance, individualism-collectivism, and language usage. These differences can cause misunderstandings, stereotyping, and communication breakdowns, especially for international students navigating unfamiliar social and academic environments.

Barriers to Cross-Cultural Communication

Several barriers hinder effective communication across cultures. Language differences, accent and fluency, ethnocentrism, cultural assumptions, and stereotypes are among the most common. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory provides insight into how national cultural values such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism shape communication styles (Hofstede, 2001). In the context of international education, emotional and psychological factors such as anxiety, culture shock, and lack of cultural awareness also contribute to communication difficulties. These barriers can affect the student's ability to adapt, perform academically, and build meaningful relationships in host environments.

Language and Identity in Intercultural Communication

Language is not only a tool of communication but also a marker of identity. Norton (2013) argues that language learning and communication in intercultural contexts are intertwined with issues of power, identity negotiation, and legitimacy. Indonesian IISMA students may experience moments where their language skills are questioned, impacting their self-confidence and sense of belonging in academic or social spaces. Intercultural competence is defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures (Deardorff, 2006). It includes skills such as empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and behavioral flexibility. International students who develop higher levels of intercultural competence are generally more successful in overcoming communication challenges.

Previous Related Study

A study by Zhang and Zhou (2019) investigated the intercultural communication challenges faced by Chinese international students in the United States. The findings revealed that language proficiency, unfamiliarity with host cultural norms, and lack of confidence contributed significantly to communication breakdowns. These challenges align with those faced by Indonesian students in English-speaking environments like Australia. Brown and Holloway (2008) conducted a longitudinal study on British students studying abroad and identified culture shock, homesickness, and identity dissonance as core barriers to effective communication. The study emphasized that emotional responses to cultural difference often manifest as withdrawal or miscommunication. Andrade (2006) examined academic adjustment of international students and noted that beyond language barriers, students often misunderstand academic expectations, class participation styles, and communication with faculty. This is especially relevant to IISMA awardees who are expected to adapt quickly in immersive academic contexts. A study by Tran (2013) explored emotional resilience and intercultural sensitivity among Southeast Asian students in Australia. The research highlighted that students often face

internalized stress and emotional barriers which limit their willingness to communicate in intercultural contexts.

METHOD

Design and Samples

The method of research used in this article is the qualitative method. The research was conducted online, due to the difference in locations between the writer and the sample of research. The population of this research is the 14 (fourteen) IISMA for Vocational Students awardees at Phoenix Academy for year 2022, and the sample of research is the entire population of IISMA for Vocational Students awardees at Phoenix Academy for year 2022, with the method of sampling used being purposive sampling. The awardees were referred under the aliases AL, FD, CT, ER, EV, FN, FB, FR, KV, NJ, RM, JH, SB, and TR from this point onwards.

Instrument and Procedure

To collect the data, in-depth interviews were conducted with the writer as interviewer and the fourteen IISMA awardees as interviewees on a one-by-one basis through Zoom or Google Meet. WhatsApp voice notes were utilised for alternative when virtual meetings were not feasible. In the interview, the writer addressed a list of questions based on the cross-cultural communication problem theory by Kiss (2005). The data collected was documented as videos, audio tapes, and field notes; the last expanded after each interview to ensure validity of data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study followed a qualitative approach using thematic analysis to explore the cross-cultural communication challenges faced by IISMA 2022 awardees. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with selected participants and transcribed the data verbatim. After data transcription, initial coding was carried out to identify significant patterns, keywords, and expressions that reflected the participants' communication experiences. These codes were then grouped into categories representing broader themes such as language difficulties, cultural misunderstandings, and adaptation to academic communication styles. This inductive approach allowed the researcher to capture the depth of personal experiences without imposing predetermined categories.

Following the thematic coding, the researcher carefully interpreted the emerging themes in relation to the theoretical framework of intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. To ensure credibility and reliability, triangulation was applied through peer debriefing and member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to verify the interpretations of their responses. The researcher also maintained a reflective journal to document potential biases and assumptions throughout the analysis. The final themes presented not only illustrate the barriers

experienced but also reveal coping strategies and cultural learning processes, offering a nuanced understanding of the awardees' intercultural encounters at Phoenix Academy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Barriers

This section contains the cross-cultural communication barriers faced by Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) for Vocational Students 2022 awardees throughout the duration of their stay. The writer identified six causes of cross-cultural communication barriers faced by Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) for Vocational Students 2022 awardees at Phoenix Academy, namely different communication styles, different attitudes towards conflicts, different approaches to completing tasks, different decision-making styles, different attitudes towards disclosure, and different approaches to knowing.

The first barrier is cross-cultural communication barriers due to different communication styles due to language usage, degree of assertion, and nonverbal communication. Nine awardees encountered difficulties with varying usage of words and phrases, as well as different accents, while communicating in Australia. CT highlighted that certain vocabularies were understood differently by Australians, leading to miscommunication, such as in the instance where "lamp" (lampu in Indonesian) was interpreted as "study lamp" instead of "room light." Other awardee, KV described the challenge of unfamiliar slang and abbreviations like "keen" and "arvo," which initially caused confusion. The awardees also struggled with the Australian accent and speed in speech, making it hard to comprehend conversations, as exemplified by AL's difficulty understanding a common greeting. In the degree of assertion, four awardees noted a culture shock due to Australians' higher assertiveness and expressiveness. ER mentioned the unfamiliarity with strangers greeting them, a common practice in Australia but not in Indonesia. The absence of hierarchy in Australian culture, as noted by JH, also contributed to the casual and assertive communication style. Lastly, in nonverbal communication, three awardees observed that Australians used expressive facial gestures to stress their points, as exemplified by RM's experience with an expressive lecturer.

The second barrier is cross-cultural communication barriers due to different attitudes towards conflict, whose main cause lies in different method of preference to solve conflicts. While not experiencing conflict directly, two awardees, AL and RM, mentioned that the dissimilarity in conflict resolution had caught them off-guard. RM recounted an incident where the lecturer at Phoenix Academy assertively reprimanded a student for using their phone in class, highlighting the confrontational nature of solving conflict in the country. In contrast, RM noted that

Indonesians tend to handle conflicts more discreetly, preferring to tell others in private.

The third barrier is cross-cultural communication barriers due to different approaches to completing tasks, which revolve around how a culture moves to finish a task, different perception of time, and which aspect a culture values more between finishing tasks and maintaining relationship. Five awardees (FD, FN, NJ, RM, and TR) reported that they faced cross-cultural communication barriers due to different approaches to completing tasks. TR observed that Australian students in their class adopted a more relaxed approach to studying, contrasting with TR's preference for a quicker pace. RM echoed this sentiment, noting that local students seemed to feel less pressured about academic deadlines. Another awardee, FR added that the local students at Phoenix tended to work independently and rarely sought help outside the materials provided, unlike the awardees who often collaborate and seek clarification from their peers and lecturers. NJ and FD also highlighted their surprise at the block learning system implemented by Phoenix Academy, which condensed course materials into a shorter timeframe, leading to a more intense schedule than what they experienced at their home universities. On the other hand, ten awardees (AL, FD, CT, ER, EV, FB, KV, NJ, RM, and TR) perceived the Australian culture to be highly punctual, with strict adherence to schedules, whether for public transportation or classes. ER noted that in Australia, buses arrive and depart precisely on time, and lateness in classes often results in not being allowed to enter, unless previously notified. This punctuality extends to assignment deadlines, which initially troubled many awardees who had to adjust to the academic timeframe. As for the priority between tasks and relationship, one awardee (KV) remarked that work-life balance was thoroughly practiced, with lecturers maintaining friendly relationships with students, which includes engaging with them on a personal level (such as remembering their names shortly after their arrival) while continuing to perform their responsibilities to teach.

The fourth barrier is cross-cultural communication barriers due to different decision-making styles, which revolve around the priority between personal decision and group decision, and the method primarily used in a culture to make decisions. Six awardees (AL, CT, ER, KV, RM, and TR) encountered cross-cultural communication barriers due to decision-making process. In Indonesia, decisions are often driven by either dominant individuals or the majority, with the group typically following these decisions. In contrast, in Australia most awardees noticed that its culture prioritizes collective input, ensuring everyone's opinions are considered before making a decision. This was exemplified by CT's experience of Australians valuing the thoughts of all parties involved and TR's observation of inclusive academic discussions. On the other hand, four awardees (CT, KV, RM, and TR) claimed that they faced cross-cultural communication barriers thanks to difference in decision-making methods. Apart from TR's mention of its use in academic settings, discussions are predominantly used to exchange thoughts when making a decision in Australian culture. Another awardee, KV further attested that when they interacted with their friends, multiple aspects were considered before settling on a

decision, such as taking others' time and financial constraints into account. They admitted they were used to accommodating into others' choices, but the experience drove them to think critically during decision-making.

The fifth barrier is cross-cultural communication barriers due to different attitudes towards disclosure, which revolve around emotional expressions and the withholding of personal information. Seven awardees (AL, ER, FB, FR, KV, RM, and JH) claimed that they experienced cross-cultural communication barriers due to different approach in expressing emotions. Based on their experience, Australians tend to be more open and direct in expressing their emotions and addressing mistakes clearly. FR recalled that the manager of their dormitory addressed noise issues and reminded them to be mindful in a calm manner. Contrarily, Indonesians behave more evasively towards emotional expressions. FB, in support of FR's statement, recalled one instance: when offered food, the locals would take the food right away, whereas Indonesians are visibly more reluctant out of fear that they would be perceived as rude. This disparity in expressing emotions likely stem from the countries' respective cultural values: while Australia encourages freedom in expression, Indonesia places more importance on what it perceives as 'manners', thereby limiting its people's expressions in accordance to circumstance and social standing. Apart from emotional expressions, six awardees (AL, CT, ER, KV, RM, and JH) reported that they experienced cross-cultural communication barriers due to the withholding of personal information. The Australian culture encourages setting boundary between personal and professional lives, with lecturers at Phoenix Academy sharing personal details only in informal settings and focusing strictly on work in professional environments. KV remarked that they would only bring up their past experiences when they are relevant to the teaching materials at hands. On top of that, their value on work-life balance is reflected in their preference for email communication over more personal platforms like WhatsApp; and even then, they would only response during working hours.

The last and sixth barrier is cross-cultural communication barriers due to different approaches to knowing, which revolve around different learning styles and ways to seek information. Thirteen awardees (AL, FD, CT, ER, EV, FN, FB, FR, KV, NJ, RM, SB, and TR) claimed that they faced cross-cultural communication barriers due to different learning styles. Every single one of them recounted high emphasis on student participation and discussion at Phoenix Academy, with NJ stressing that all classes there encouraged group discussions and active student participation. This, understandably, instigated feelings of anxiety on several awardees, who were more accustomed to passive learning. In terms of assignments, TR testified that the system they were taught with in Phoenix gave out assignments which are designed to encourage students' critical thinking skills, and based on that, they were expected to communicate their opinions to answer the assignment. On the other hand, the questions given in assignments in Indonesian education is simpler in the sense that the answers to them can easily be located in textbooks. Finally, awardee AL accounted how extensive the usage of technology is in Phoenix Academy's curriculum, showcased in how the trainers or lecturers recording each class session

using the videotelephony application Zoom which also allows physically absent student to participate in the classes from home. The recording will subsequently be uploaded to Phoenix' learning portal at the end of the class, facilitating students with access to materials even after class hours. This contrasts with their experience at their home university, as AL remarked that web-based learning system was only established in recent times. Five awardees (AL, FD, CT, FN, and KV) experienced barriers due to difference ways to seek information. AL noted that the curriculum at Phoenix Academy placed great emphasis on literacy, and this was evident at how the lecturers and students seek information through books and articles, inside and outside scholastic environment. This practice is not as prevalent in Indonesia, unless for specific assignments.

This section explicates what are done Indonesian by International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) for Vocational Students 2022 awardees at Phoenix Academy to overcome the cross-cultural communication barriers they have experienced during the program. This section summaries the findings explicated in the preceding sections, which consists of the six cross-cultural communication barriers faced by IISMA for Vocational Students 2022 awardees at Phoenix Academy and the solutions for each barrier. The following table lists each barrier and the specific methods used by the awardees to overcome them.

Table 1. Summary of Barriers and Solutions

Barrier	Cause of Barrier	Solution
Different communication styles	Language usage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Studying the meaning behind Australian expressions, slangs, and jargons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking for repetition and meanings during conversations 2. Acquainting oneself with Australian accent through exposure to classes and daily conversations. 3. Implementing jargons into conversations with appropriate contexts after learning the meaning.
	Degree of assertion	<p>Mirroring the behaviour of Australian natives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starting conversations first. - Shedding honorifics when addressing someone in a friendly manner.

	Nonverbal communication	Adapting to the expressive and open communication style of Australian culture.
Different attitudes towards conflicts	Method of preference to solve conflicts	Respecting and obeying the rules set by the institution.
Different approaches to completing tasks	Movements to completing tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asking questions to others, mainly lecturers and other awardees. 2. Discussing while completing tasks independently. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharing valid resources among other awardees to aid them. - Avoiding academic misconducts, such as cheating and plagiarism. 3. Encouraging non-IISMA / local students to actively participate in group assignments and learn together to ensure completion.
	Perception of time	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working on assignments and/or activities progressively. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dividing one project into multiple parts to work on, - Prioritizing courses with more credits. - Looking for company to keep track of each other's progress. 2. Completing activities in accordance with schedule. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arriving early to appointments. - Monitoring academic timetables and other schedules (e.g. arrival time of public transports). - Setting up multiple alarms to ensure early preparation.
	Priority between work and	Adapting to the culture of work-life balance by maintaining a friendly yet

	maintaining relationship	professional relationship with lecturers and friends with utmost priority to complete tasks.
Different decision-making style	Priority between personal decision and group decision	Learning to come up with decision which would benefit all parties involved and think proactively. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contemplating about multiple factors thoroughly prior to making decision instead of letting the majority speaks.
	Method to make decisions	Actively expressing thoughts and opinions in discussions.
Different attitudes towards disclosure	Difference in emotional expressions	Learning to adjust with the open communication styles in social interactions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging oneself to be confident and comfortable with expressing their current feelings.
	The withholding of personal information	Respecting others' sense of privacy through an exposure to work-life balance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking questions in advance during class hours. - Contacting lecturers through their work email during operational hours. - Being mindful of the professional environment and the personal information they share.
Different approaches to knowing	Different learning styles	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conducting independent learning. 2. Discussing with other awardees regarding the subject of the courses. 3. Studying the technology implemented in class.
	Different ways to seek information	Browsing through legal sources and learning how to cite their data properly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading official materials provided by Phoenix Academy.

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- Reading legal journals and textbooks to enhance literacy level.
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Conforming to the previous sections, the writer found out that the principal causes of cross-cultural communication barriers the IISMA awardees came to grip with in Australia are six types of cultural differences, ranging from communication style to ways of knowing. In order to overcome said barriers, the awardees were demanded to adapt and accommodate the culture of their host country despite espousing contrasting cultural values back in Indonesia (Sudarwati et al., 2024). That being said, it was brought to attention that there are multiple factors serving as enablers for the awardees' adaptation process, just like how barriers exist when one confronts a foreign culture for the first time. Kristiana & Benito (2023) exposed that there were five enablers to cultural adaptation, namely personal communication, host social communication, ethnic social communication, environment, and predisposition, and how they served as enablers for the IISMA awardees to overcome the barriers at Phoenix Academy will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first enabler against cross-cultural communication barrier is personal communication, which is defined as the form of communication which takes place an individual senses the events within their surroundings, then makes a meaning out of them and gives a response against said event. In terms of personal communication, the IISMA awardees were exposed to happenings that they had never encountered in Indonesia and in return, they began accommodating to the new culture and gave positive reception (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). As the adaptation process was based on each awardee's personal communication competence, the period taken to fully adjust into their surroundings slightly varied, but it can be concluded that their proficiency in personal communication enabled them to overcome cross-cultural communication barriers in Australia.

The second enabler against cross-cultural communication barrier is host social communication, which is defined as the communication process occurring between a migrant and a native from the host culture. Host social communication process covers two types of communication processes: interpersonal communication (interactions between one individual with another) and mass communication (interactions between an individual and the collective public through media-based means and nonmedia-based means) (Budiarti et al., 2022). When it comes to host social communication process, the awardees experienced an open and welcoming interpersonal communication process, with native Australians being incredibly adamant on highlighting the expression of each individual and thereby encouraging them to act the same (Dawya & Okvitawanli, 2024). This is most prevalent in classroom-based discussions, but not limited to it, as many awardees befriending locals were taught similar values by their acquaintances. Not only are they demonstrative in interpersonal communication, the awardees' experiences have showcased how important mass communication is, evidenced by the learning

curriculum placing strong focus on public presentations and group discussions (Rings & Rasinger, 2022). They were also exposed to Australian media, from the internet, local news, television, and even sites of certain local organizations, learning how the media in the country conveyed a message and adapted subsequently thanks to this (Rings & Rasinger, 2022).

The third enabler against cross-cultural communication barrier is ethnic social communication, defined as the communication process occurring between individuals hailing from the same cultural backgrounds or culture that they have been exposed to before. Like the previous host social communication, ethnic social communication also involves interpersonal communication and mass communication (Usua, 2016). In terms of interpersonal communication, the fifteen IISMA awardees at Phoenix Academy found a sense of security and belonging among themselves, but they ventured outside their shell the moment they met native Indonesians in the Australian society, communicated with them, and then ventured to broader network from their fellow Indonesians (Agustin & Purwanto, 2023; Taufiqi & Purwanto, 2024). Mass ethnic communication took place through networks amassed by the Indonesian society in Perth, as many browsed and exchanged information using and based on the media released by said societies (i.e. the social media account of General Consulate of Republic of Indonesia for Perth and the events involving Indonesian Student Association in Western Australia).

The fourth enabler against cross-cultural communication barrier is environment, referring to host's acceptance, pressure to adapt from the host, and influence from local ethnic groups (Novia et al., 2024; Purwanto & Umar, 2024). As Australia is a multicultural country which teems with immigrants, they are extremely open to newcomers to the country, international students like the IISMA awardees included. Thanks to that, the awardees sensed neither social pressure to adapt nor sanctions towards failure. On top of that, the environment in Australia highly encourages learning and freedom, making the awardees at ease and enabling them to accommodate their transition.

The final, but equally important enabler against cross-cultural communication barrier is predisposition, defined as to a migrant's personal condition upon their arrival, their cultural background, and their personal experiences before assimilating into the local cultural values. In this case, all of the IISMA awardees hail from various regions across Indonesia, with cultural background unique to each of them, but they share the similarity of being scholarship recipients for an international mobility program and had received pre-departure education prior to their study. Furthermore, they were all vocational students, some even coming from the same city home university, with similar personal experiences. They were essentially prepared to become international citizens even before the IISMA program took place, and this predisposition served as a foundation to their adaptation against the cross-cultural communication barriers they faced in Australia.

To conclude, the IISMA for Vocational Students 2022 awardees at Phoenix Academy overcame the cross-cultural communication with the help of five enablers, namely personal communication, host social communication, ethnic social communication, environment, and predisposition (M. Bambang Purwanto et al., 2024). The enablers were both internal (personal communication and predisposition) and external (host social communication, ethnic social communication, and environment), and the combined approach they were exposed to in the months as IISMA awardees allowed them to bypass the difficulties communicating due to cultural difference (Bonar Siagian & M Bambang Purwanto, 2023; Rosyidin & Purwanto, 2024). At last, it was thanks to these enablers the awardees were able to devise solutions against the barriers, before eventually adapting to the Australian society as global citizens

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by IISMA for Vocational Students 2022 awardees at Phoenix Academy are branches of different communication styles, different attitudes towards conflicts, different approaches to completing tasks, different decision-making styles, different attitudes towards disclosure, and difference in approaches to knowing, and their way to overcome them is to enhance their capabilities, to place faith in themselves, and to learn to take initiatives. One suggestion the writer would like to give to not only awardees, but also every individual who mobilises from their home country to another, is to arrange preparation. While cultural barriers are inevitable, conducting research in-advance and acting accordingly to the data gathered would significantly help the process of overcoming them. It is advised to every individual to keep an open mind and embrace other cultures, for the more one knows about the culture, the less prevalent the shock will be.

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