

The Role of Interpals Application in Developing Intercultural Communication Competence among Learners

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Abstract

Beground - Intercultural communication competence (ICC) has become increasingly important in the digital era, where online platforms enable learners to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Applications such as Interpals provide opportunities for authentic intercultural communication and experiential learning beyond traditional classroom settings.

Purpose - This study investigates the role of the Interpals application in fostering intercultural communication competence among learners in Jakarta.

Method/Approach - This study employed a qualitative approach using interviews and chat-based observations as the primary data collection methods. The participants consisted of 25 learners who actively engaged in intercultural interactions through the Interpals application. The collected data were analyzed to identify the development of intercultural communication competence among participants.

Findings - The findings reveal that participation in Interpals facilitates the development of intercultural communication competence through direct and meaningful intercultural interactions. Participants demonstrated increased openness and curiosity toward different cultures, enhanced cultural understanding through the exchange of information and personal experiences, and improved communication skills, particularly in clarifying meaning, adapting language use, and reducing misunderstandings. The study also identified the development of internal outcomes, including empathy and cultural awareness, as well as external outcomes reflected in the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively in intercultural contexts.

Conclusion - Interpals application serves as a valuable digital platform that supports experiential learning and contributes to the development of intercultural communication competence among learners. Through authentic intercultural engagement, learners are able to strengthen both their intercultural awareness and communication abilities.

Novelty/Originality/Value - This study contributes to the growing body of research on digital intercultural learning by providing empirical evidence of how Interpals application supports the development of intercultural communication competence among Indonesian learners, particularly in the context of Jakarta.

Keywords: Digital intercultural interaction; Interpals application; Intercultural communication competence; Language learning

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INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization and digitalization has created vast opportunities for intercultural interaction among people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Rahmah et al., 2024). The development of communication technology allow individuals from different parts of the world to connect and interact instantly (Arjulayana, 2025). Digital interaction among young people today has shifted significantly from traditional communication toward online platforms that promote intercultural exchange. One of the platforms that facilitates such interaction is *Interpals* application, which allows users from various cultural backgrounds to connect, practice languages, and share cultural perspectives in informal and authentic ways (Maulana et al., 2024). This phenomenon is particularly strong among young people aged 18-25, who are highly active technology users and open to cross cultural experiences. Oliveira et al. (2024), found that young people are among the most active users of digital media, using it not only for social communication but also to explore cultural diversity in online spaces. This shows that digital media functions beyond entertainment. It also serves as a multicultural environment where young generations develop intercultural awareness and sensitivity. In big cities like Jakarta, where technology use among youth is particularly high, platform such as *Interpals* application have strong potential to foster intercultural communication competence through informal and meaningful interactions (Muszyńska et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, digital technologies create opportunities for intercultural interaction while also introducing cultural and linguistic challenges. Rahmawati et al. (2024) explain that differences in cultural context, stereotypes, and language can cause misunderstandings in digitally mediated exchanges. Cultural globalization also produces varied local responses. E. B. (2023), for example, found that communities in Semarang maintained local cultural diversity by combining global products with local cultural practices. This finding shows why exposure to global culture should not be treated as evidence of cultural homogenization in every setting. Hasan et al. (2024) discuss the pressures that globalization places on local cultural identity and Pancasila. In educational settings, Putri et al. (2023) emphasize the need to understand learners and select appropriate teaching strategies; their study concerns junior secondary pedagogy rather than digital cultural homogenization. These distinctions support examining how learners in Jakarta interpret cultural differences during *InterPals* interactions, rather than assuming that access alone produces intercultural communication competence.

Cross-cultural communication requires awareness of the social and cultural context so, that the meaning of the message can be well received and understood by both parties. In line with this, Chen (2022) emphasizes the importance of intercultural communication competence (ICC) as an individual's ability to interact effectively and appropriately in a cross-cultural context, which includes the dimensions of cultural knowledge, awareness, communication skills, and openness to differences. Recent research also shows that digital platforms have significant potential in shaping this competence. For example, research conducted by Puspitasari (2023) shows that students who are active in multicultural online communities experience increased sensitivity and intercultural communication through reflective and collaborative digital interactions. These three opinions indicate that understanding the concepts of intercultural communication and Intercultural Communication Competence is an important foundation for examining the phenomenon of using online platforms such as *Interpals* application (Chen, 2022; Meilani et al., 2024; Puspitasari, 2023)

In examining the development of intercultural communication competence through online interactions, this study adopt the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence developed by Deardorff (2006) as its main theoretical foundation. Deardorff conceptualize intercultural communication competence as a combination of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal and external outcomes that enable individuals to communicate appropriately and effectively (Deardorff, 2006).

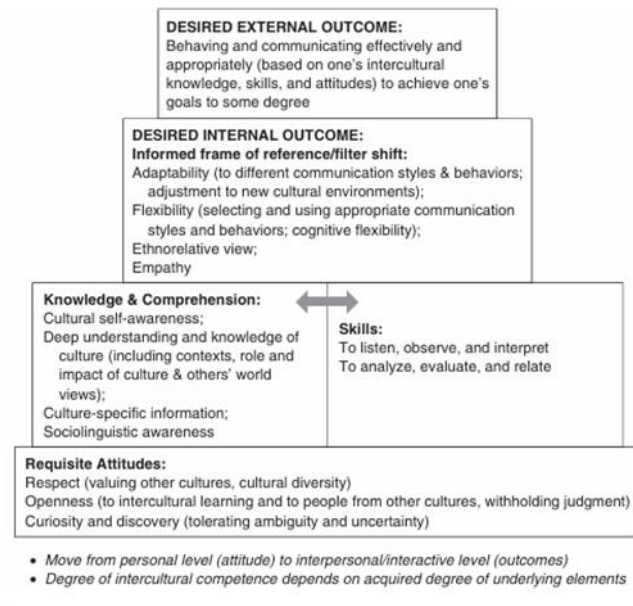


Figure 1. Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence

The model emphasizes that attitudes such as openness and curiosity are the basis for intercultural development, which then supports the acquisition of cultural knowledge and interaction skills. These elements contribute to the development of effective and appropriate intercultural communication. This framework is particularly relevant to the present study, as interactions through the *Interpals* application enable learners to engage in authentic intercultural exchanges, enhance their cultural understanding, and develop their communication skills in real life contexts.

Based on the previous theoretical perspectives, it is important to explore how these concepts are applied in real life online interactions, particularly through digital platforms like *Interpals* application. Building on the previous discussion of intercultural communication competence, several studies have emphasized its importance in language learning and cultural understanding (Chen, 2022; Meilani et al., 2024; Puspitasari, 2023). However, research within the Indonesian context, especially in Jakarta, remains limited. Most previous studies have focused on developing intercultural communication in formal contexts such as classrooms or student exchange programs, whereas cross cultural interactions through informal digital platforms like *Interpals* application have not been widely explored (Muszyńska et al., 2023; Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026; Safitri et al., 2025). In fact, young people in Jakarta have broad access to technology and are highly active in digital spaces, providing strong potential for the development of intercultural communication competence through such platforms. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the role of *Interpals* application in developing intercultural communication competence among young learners in Jakarta. Accordingly, this study is guided by two research question: (1) How do young learners in Jakarta use the *Interpals* Application in their online intercultural interactions? and (2) In what ways do these interactions contribute to the development of intercultural communication competence. Specifically, it aims to identify the ways in which these interactions enhance users cultural awareness, openness, and communication skill across cultures.

METHODS

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the role of the *Interpals* application in developing intercultural communication competence among learners in Jakarta. The research subjects consisted 25 of young people aged 18-25 who were active users of the *Interpals* application for at least 3 months, the participants selected using purposive sampling techniques. The

research procedure included identifying and recruiting participants, conducting in-depth written interviews and collecting evidence of conversations in the form of documentation that had been disguised to maintain participant confidentiality. The research instrument contained a list of open-ended interview based on indicators in [Deardorff's \(2006\)](#) intercultural communication competence model, particularly in the aspects of attitudes (openness, curiosity), knowledge and skills, and internal and external outcomes related to intercultural communication skills. Data was collected through interviews consisted of 18 open-ended questions which were divided into three parts, observation of participants' digital interaction patterns on the *Interpals* application and supporting documentation: screenshot of chats and examples of participants interactions. The data will analyze thematically coding important parts, and then grouping them to form themes that represented their experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Use of Interpals Application in Online Intercultural Interaction

The research findings indicate that young learners in Jakarta use the Interpals app as their primary platform for cross-cultural interaction. Most respondents use this app to communicate with users from various countries, primarily for language practice, exchanging cultural information, and building international friendships. Interactions within the Interpals app tend to be relaxed and informal, which fosters a more natural communication environment.

"learn languages with the native speakers or new friends with the same interests as me"

"My main purpose is to meet international friends, improve my English skills, and learn more about different cultures directly from native people"

"Practice foreign languages, make international friends, and learn about different cultures"

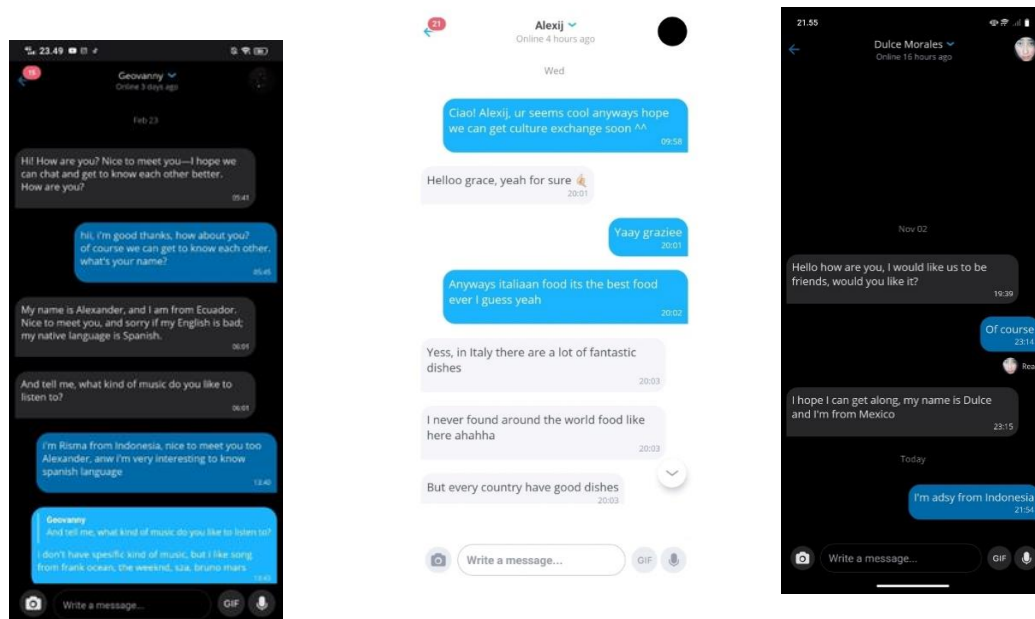


Figure 2. Example of Intercultural Interaction through The Interpals Application

These findings indicate that the *Interpals* app serves as a medium for experiential learning, where users can gain cultural understanding through direct interaction ([Wibowo et al., 2024](#)). This aligns with the research by [Gutiérrez-Santiuste and Ritacco-Real \(2023\)](#) that digital communication technology facilitates direct cross-cultural interaction, which supports the development of intercultural communication competencies. Furthermore, research by [Ichikawa and Kim \(2025\)](#) also confirms that individuals' cultural sensitivity develops through interactions in intercultural environments, including

digital contexts that bring together diverse cultural backgrounds. The role of digital platforms in supporting responsible and productive interaction is also consistent with research emphasizing the importance of digital ethics and appropriate online behavior among students (Zidni & Ekarini, 2025)

Development of Attitudes: Openness and Curiosity

Research findings indicate that the use of the Interpals app contributes to the development of openness and curiosity toward other cultures. Approximately 70% of respondents demonstrated an active interest in learning about foreign cultures through questions, discussions, and the exchange of experiences. This means that curiosity is one of the dominant attitudes developed through intercultural interaction, while the remaining 30% of respondents showed a more passive level of engagement in learning about other cultures.

"it's amazing that i have a chance to learn a new perspectives, traditions, and ways of thinking. also it's a great way to build connections and friendships across borders"

"im addicted to it, it makes me curious even more! especially if our partner in talking is very talkative"

"Im able to know the characteristic of people who come from East Europe (Italy, Spain) with North Europe (Germany, Netherlands) their both quite different since the North Europe its more straight forwards but East Europe its more friendly."

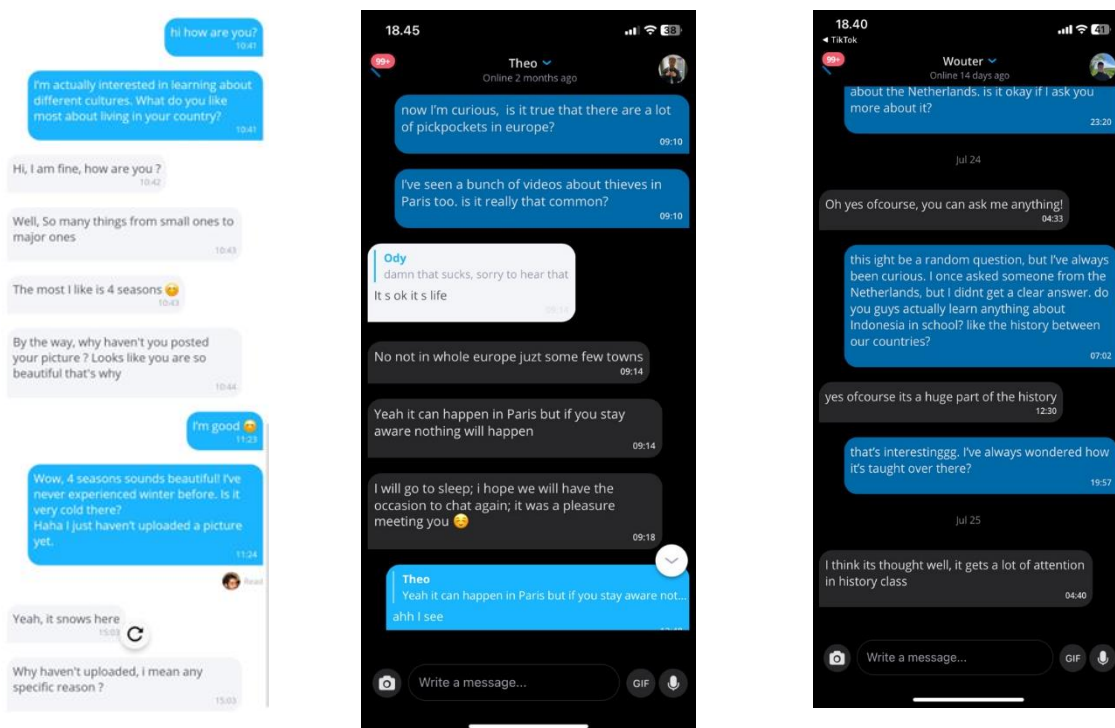


Figure 3. Example of Curiosity and Openness in Intercultural Interaction

Respondents demonstrated a more tolerant attitude and were less quick to judge cultural differences. This was evident in the way they responded to conversations with a respectful attitude. These findings suggest that repeated interactions in intercultural settings can foster an open attitude toward differences. This aligns with Yasmine et al. (2025), who state that engagement with digital media allows individuals to interact with diverse social and cultural contexts, thereby broadening their understanding, awareness, and sensitivity toward different cultures. In Darla K. Deardorff's (2006) ICC model, openness and curiosity serve as the primary foundations for developing intercultural communication competencies. These findings reinforce that interaction experiences through the *Interpals* app can gradually build these foundations.

Development of Knowledge: Cultural Understanding

The research findings indicate that participants demonstrated an improved understanding of culture after using the *Interpals* app. They not only gained new information but also began to understand the differences in values, norms, and communication styles across cultures.

"I learned, new cultures, holidays, and ways of thinking"

"I have learned about traditional foods, festivals, education systems, daily habits, and social norms in different countries. I also learned how people celebrate national holidays differently"

"Through my interactions on Interpals, I have gained knowledge about daily lifestyles, traditional foods, festivals, communication styles, and social norms in different countries. I also learned how cultural values influence people's perspectives and ways of expressing themselves."



Figure 4. Example of Cultural Knowledge Exchange in Intercultural Communication

The quote and picture above reflect the responses of several participants, indicating that cultural learning is contextual and based on direct experience. This is supported by [Yee et al. \(2025\)](#), who state that direct interaction in multicultural environments enables individuals to develop a contextual understanding of culture grounded in real-world experiences. Within Deardorff's framework, cultural knowledge is a crucial component supporting the development of intercultural communication competencies. Without this understanding, individuals will struggle to communicate effectively in cross-cultural contexts ([Deardorff, 2006](#)).

Development of Skills: Communication Skills

The research findings indicate that using the *Interpals* app helps participants develop cross-cultural communication skills. Participants become more skilled at conveying messages, adapting their language, and avoiding misunderstandings. This findings is in line with studies showing that technology-supported learning environments can enhance learners' oral communication skills and facilitate meaningful communication practices in educational contexts ([Ragab et al., 2025](#))

"i usually follow their culture of how to speak politely and trying to be friendly in the way they'd understand us"

"I usually adjust my language by using simpler English and avoiding local slang to ensure they understand me clearly. I also try to be more polite and mindful of their cultural norms to maintain a respectful conversation."

"I usually use simple english and polite words. I try to avoid using slang and explain clearly so they can understand me easily."

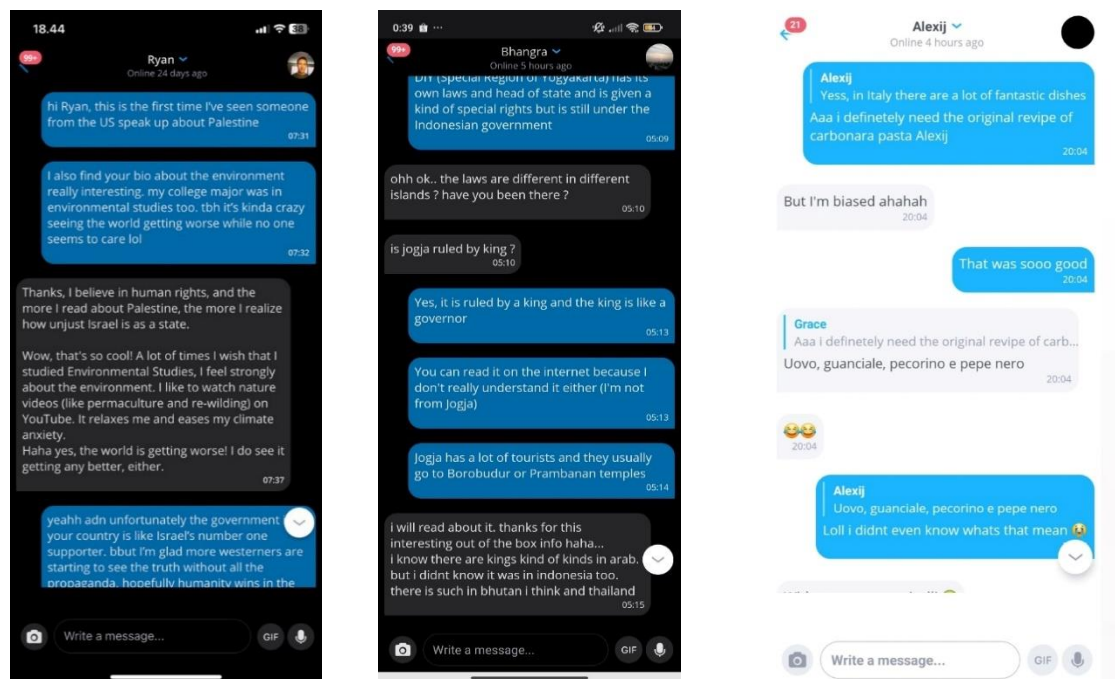


Figure. 5 Example of Communication Strategies in Intercultural Interaction

These findings indicate that digital interactions provide an effective practice environment for users to develop communication skills firsthand. This aligns with research by [Aladini and Gheisari \(2025\)](#), which suggests that digital platforms such as digital language exchange platforms can offer opportunities for direct communication practice with individuals from different cultural backgrounds and contribute to the enhancement of intercultural communication competence. In Deardorff's model, communication skills are a crucial aspect that enables individuals to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations ([Deardorff, 2006](#)).

Internal Outcomes

The research findings indicate internal changes among the respondents, such as increased self-confidence, empathy, and cultural awareness. Approximately 65% of respondents reported becoming more confident in communicating and better able to understand others' perspectives. This means that intercultural interaction through the *Interpals* application contributes to the development of positive internal changes, particularly in shaping learners' confidence and empathy. Meanwhile, around 35% of respondents showed a more gradual development, especially in terms of building confidence in intercultural communication.

"Yes, I feel much more confident. I really like cultural differences, so learning about them makes me happy and satisfied. I also enjoy talking with strangers from other countries because they don't really know me, so I feel more free and comfortable to express myself"

"Yes, it has. I used to rely on stereotypes, but now I realize that every individual is unique and culture is much deeper than what we see in the media."

"Yes, since there would be alot of differences it changes my way, like i should be more careful in what i was going to say since we don't know what are they gonna see when i say something that might be too offensive or something"

The findings demonstrate that engagement in cross-cultural interactions contributes not only to the development of communication skills but also to the transformation of individuals attitudes and perspectives. In support of this, research by [Dalib et al. \(2023\)](#) shows that attitudes toward cultural differences play a crucial role in shaping intercultural communication competence as well as how individuals interpret cross-cultural interactions. In Deardorff's model, these changes fall under internal outcomes that is, the transformation of an individual's attitudes and perspectives following intercultural interactions. This indicates that the use of *Interpals* has an impact not only externally but also internally.

External Outcomes

The research findings indicate that the participants were able to apply their intercultural communication skills in real-life interactions. They were able to sustain conversations, understand the context of communication, and respond appropriately to the situation.

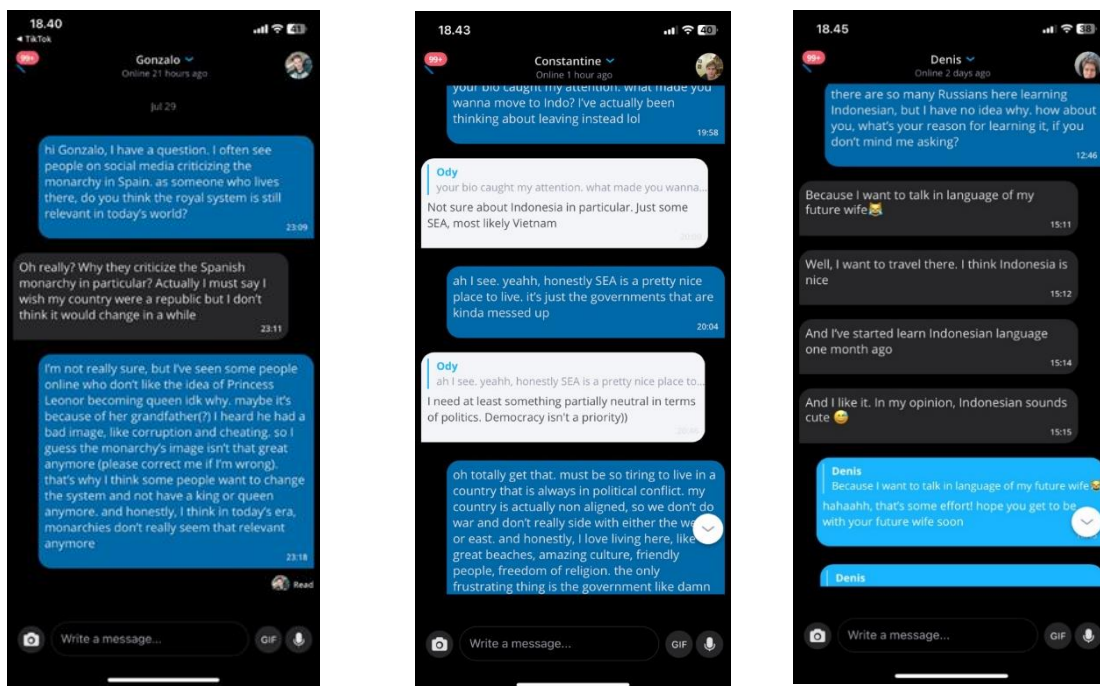


Figure 6. Example of Appropriate Communication in Intercultural Interaction

This is evident in interactions where respondents discuss sensitive topics while maintaining politeness in their communication. For example, one respondent expressed their opinion by saying, *"I'm not really sure... please correct me if I'm wrong."* This statement demonstrates the ability to communicate appropriately while considering the other person's perspective, as well as an openness to correction ([Nadeem & Zabrodskaia, 2023](#)). This reflects effective cross-cultural communication as described in Deardorff's model.

This study reveals that most respondents demonstrated openness and curiosity toward other cultures through their interactions on the *Interpals* application. They showed interest in learning about different cultural perspectives by asking questions, engaging in discussions, and exchanging experiences. This suggests that digital intercultural interaction can foster the development of positive attitudes toward cultural diversity.

This finding is in line with the framework of intercultural communication competence proposed by Deardorff (2006) which emphasizes that openness and curiosity are fundamental components in developing ICC. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have examined the role of digital platforms in promoting intercultural awareness and shaping learners attitudes. Additionally, respondents also showed improvement in cultural knowledge, as they began to understand the differences in values, customs, and perspectives of other cultures. This process is not only informative but also reflective. This aligns with Hackett et al. (2023), who suggest that direct interactions in digital environments can strengthen cultural understanding through real-world experiences. Furthermore, the research findings indicate that respondents developed cross-cultural communication skills, such as the ability to adapt language, clarify meaning, and employ communication strategies to avoid misunderstandings. These abilities demonstrate pragmatic awareness in intercultural communication. These findings are reinforced by research by Yue and Mu (2025), which confirms that intercultural communication in digital environments requires the use of appropriate communication strategies to adapt meaning and avoid misunderstandings in intercultural interactions.

At a more advanced stage, the respondents demonstrated development in internal outcomes, such as increased empathy and awareness of social and cultural differences. This indicates that intercultural interactions influence not only cognitive but also affective aspects. Additionally, the respondents' ability to discuss sensitive topics politely and openly demonstrates the achievement of external outcomes, namely the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural contexts.

Overall, these findings indicate that the *Interpals* app serves as an effective medium for intercultural learning, as it facilitates the comprehensive development of intercultural communication competence (ICC) encompassing attitudes, knowledge, skills, and both internal and external outcomes. Thus, digital platforms like *Interpals* hold significant potential for use in language learning and intercultural communication in the global era.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the role of the *Interpals* app in developing intercultural communication competence (ICC) among learners in Jakarta. The findings indicate that the use of the *Interpals* app can contribute to supporting the development of ICC through direct interaction with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Interactions occurring through the *Interpals* app foster an attitude of openness and curiosity toward other cultures, as well as enhance respondents' understanding of differences in values, customs, and cultural perspectives. Additionally, respondents demonstrated improvements in communication skills, such as the ability to adapt language and employ communication strategies to avoid misunderstandings. Furthermore, these interactions contribute to internal changes, such as increased empathy and cultural awareness, as well as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in cross-cultural contexts. These findings indicate that digital platforms like *Interpals* can serve as experience-based cross-cultural learning tools relevant to educational needs in the digital age. Thus, the utilization of similar platforms has the potential to be integrated into language learning and intercultural communication practices.

However, this study has limitations, particularly regarding the limited number of respondents and the focus on a single digital platform. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a more diverse group of participants and explore the use of other digital platforms to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, future research could examine the dynamics of intercultural interactions over a longer period to observe the continuous development of competencies.

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