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## Triangular Model of Intercultural Communication Competence Development: A Narrative Inquiry of an Egyptian Student in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*The growing global mobility of students highlights the importance of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) for successful academic and social integration in host countries. This study aims to investigate the development of ICC in an international student navigating a new cultural environment. Through narrative inquiry approach, the development of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) of Nubia, an Egyptian student in Indonesia is investigated by drawing on Chen and Starosta's (1996) Triangular Model of ICC. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal Nubia's significant growth across the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of ICC. Cognitively, Nubia showed development in understanding Indonesian culture and language. Affectively, she demonstrated open-mindedness and a non-judgmental attitude. Behaviorally, Nubia improved her communication skills in Bahasa Indonesia and adapted to social contexts. The study supports the principles of the Triangular Model and indicates that ICC is a dynamic process shaped by experiences and interactions.*

**Keywords:** *Intercultural Communication Competence, International Students, Cultural Adaptation, Language Learning, Indonesian Culture*

### INTRODUCTION

Globalization has resulted in a highly interconnected world. This interrelation has significant implications for higher education because students from various regions, particularly Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, seek opportunities abroad due to socioeconomic factors in their home countries, including limited economic prospects (Bibi & Hamida, 2024). This trend is reflected in the growing number of international students on campuses worldwide.

Indonesia, with its rich culture, strong academic environment, and growing economy, has emerged as a popular destination for international students as reported by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Bibi & Hamida, 2024; Maulana, 2021). The nation's significant economic advancements have also drawn global attention, with some observers highlighting its potential alongside major economic powers like India and China (Hannigan, 2015). This broader context of a rising nation, combined with its unique blend of academic excellence and cultural diversity, makes Indonesia an attractive choice for those seeking a well-rounded international education (Bibi & Hamida, 2024).

The increasing numbers of international students in Indonesia highlight the demand for their understanding, skills, and knowledge of communication to effectively socialize across various cultural backgrounds. As synthesized by Jaya et al. (2022), communication refers to the act of transferring information and establishing mutual understanding. Within the field of international education, participating in the international-experience communication significantly contributes to the development of students' intercultural communication skills and global perspectives (Bittinger et al., 2021); (Davis & Knight, 2018). This communication skill and ability was proposed by Chen in 1990 as Intercultural Communication Competence, which later in this research is written as ICC.

ICC has become a research subject in the fields of language and education since then. ICC has currently been important for individuals to effectively and appropriately engage with cultural diversity (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2016). Although there are some terms used to describe ICC, such as cross-cultural competence, global competence, global citizenship, and cultural intelligence, the core concept remains the same (Griffith et al., 2016). Yitmen (2013) emphasized the role of cultural intelligence in fostering effective cross-cultural interactions. Cultural intelligence shows how flexible a human is and what competence a human has. It encompasses the knowledge of foreign cultures, the ability to perceive and interpret cultural nuances, similarities, and differences, and the capacity to act appropriately and naturally in new cultural environments based on accurate cultural understanding (Yitmen, 2013).

In this globalized world, ICC is not only a professional skill but also a crucial key for international students to take roles in communities with varied cultural backgrounds (Wu, 2024). It involves the ability to understand and navigate cultural differences, adapt one's communication style, and develop meaningful relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Barker, 2016). Without ICC, newcomer-students would be facing discomfort, shock, and confusion due to different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic standards in the based country they currently reside (Kartika et al., 2024). Hence, according to Yingjian (2022) and Ning and Shouren (2022) in Wu (2024), sharpening ICC has become a current concern and ultimate purpose in language learning.

Focusing on the factors of its development, ICC is a multifaceted construct that encompasses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of intercultural communication. This statement is in line with a triangular model, proposed by Chen and Starosta (1996), that emphasizes the interplay of cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Moreover, Byram (1997), as cited in Jackson (2014), notably emphasizes that intercultural communicative competence focuses fundamentally on establishing and maintaining relationships, rather than merely communicating messages or exchanging information. This theoretical grounding highlights that successful intercultural engagement of international students requires not just understanding another language, but also empathy, open-mindedness, and the ability to adapt one's communication style to different cultural norms. Weinstein (1969) in Chen (1990) further noted that ICC could also be cultivated through socialization and empathy which lead to personal intelligence and sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 1996).

The cognitive aspect of ICC is manifested in the ability of intercultural awareness. As synthesized by Babao and Adiatma (2023), the cognitive aspect of cultivating ICC refers to someone's mental ability to comprehend utterances along with the meaning of a culture in intercultural communication (Babao & Adiatma, 2023). According to the prior theory by Chen and Starosta (1996), cognitive process emphasizes developing an understanding of one's own and others' cultures to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity in intercultural interactions. Similarly, Byram (1997) states that in the cognitive aspect, individuals bring a complex set of cultural knowledge to intercultural interactions, shaped by socialization within their own and other social groups (Bryam, 1997). Responding to these varied elaborations of the cognitive aspects in ICC, two crucial factors influencing the cognitive aspect were discussed by Chen and

Starosta (1996). Those factors include self-awareness and cultural awareness. Self-awareness refers to the ability to monitor and be aware of one's own cultural identity and how it influences perceptions and behaviors. Self-aware individuals are more sensitive to social cues and can effectively adapt their communication style to the specific context of the interaction. Meanwhile, cultural awareness involves understanding how cultures vary and recognizing the conventions and patterns of different cultures, including values, customs, norms, and social systems. This awareness extends to understanding how universal human behaviors, like eye contact and politeness, are adapted within specific cultural contexts. On the other hand, Arasaratnam-Smith (2016) implied that motivation and active listening skills may enhance the individual's cognitive aspect in ICC. Motivation is crucial, driving individuals to learn about and engage with other cultures. Direct interaction with people from different cultures provides valuable experiential knowledge, fostering intercultural awareness. Meanwhile, active listening skills are vital for effective communication and understanding in intercultural encounters which may lead to the enhancement of language proficiency. As noted by Chen (2014) and Barker (2016), language proficiency is fundamental for navigating intercultural interactions and conveying messages effectively. It facilitates effective communication, encourages cultural understanding, and promotes social connections (Chen, 2014).

Supporting these theoretical discussions, empirical research has actively explored methods to promote the cognitive dimension of ICC. A study conducted by Lee et al. (2023) investigated the effects of integrating intercultural communicative competence (ICC) into an online English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum for teenage EFL learners in Thailand. The study specifically addressed the cognitive dimension of ICC, measured through factors like display of intercultural awareness, which means the ability to notice and evaluate cultural differences, and interest in intercultural knowledge which means understanding cultural similarities and differences. By using a quasi-experimental design, the study demonstrated the ICC-based curriculum, which involved comparing cultures and using English to interpret new cultural information. Students in the experimental group also reported that the course helped them increase cross-cultural awareness and obtain a deeper understanding of cultural differences (Lee et al., 2023).

The second dimension is the affective aspect of ICC. It is in the ability of intercultural sensitivity which involves the emotional aspect of intercultural communication competence and emphasizes the ability to experience and manage emotions effectively during intercultural encounters (Chen, 2014). Affective competence, defined as the motivational and emotional capacity required to navigate new situations within the host environment, is significantly enhanced by a positive attitude towards the host culture and openness to new cultural experiences, which generally increases opportunities for making personal connections with locals (Panocova, 2020). More broadly, the affective aspect is characterized by the ability to empathize with, respect, and appreciate cultural differences, alongside a sensitivity to the diversity within intercultural communities (Barker, 2016; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2016; Babao & Adiatma, 2023). Hence, to contribute to intercultural sensitivity, four key personal attributes must be highly required. Those are open-mindedness, nonjudgmental attitudes, social relaxation, and enjoyment of cultural differences (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Open-mindedness demonstrates a willingness to openly express oneself and genuinely listen to and accept others' perspectives without judgment. It promotes mutual validation and respect for cultural differences. Nonjudgmental attitudes encourage sincere listening and develop a sense of mutual satisfaction and respect, while social relaxation involves managing anxiety and maintaining composure in intercultural interactions to facilitate open and effective communication. Lastly, enjoyment of cultural differences cultivates a genuine appreciation and enjoyment of engaging with diverse cultures.

The last dimension described by Chen and Starosta (1996) is the behavioral process. The behavioral dimension of intercultural competence emphasizes the ability to communicate across cultures effectively and appropriately. This includes message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills. Strong message skills, such as the fluent use of language, effective nonverbal communication, and the ability to convey messages clearly and supportively is very important. Furthermore, appropriate self-disclosure, while respecting cultural norms, is crucial for building relationships and reducing uncertainty. In addition, behavioral flexibility means the ability to select appropriate behaviors in different contexts and situations. Individuals can adapt their communication style to different contexts and situations, including the use of verbal immediacy and the ability to respond effectively to social cues. Finally, strong social skills, such as empathy, active listening, and respect for others' identities can promote understanding, building rapport, and navigating intercultural interactions successfully.

The emphasis on behavioral skills is also reflected in Dearsdorff's (2013) comprehensive model of intercultural competence. He proposes a focus on behavior, though within a broader framework encompassing attitudes, knowledge, and skills. It is argued that positive attitudes, such as curiosity, openness, and respect, form a foundation for acquiring cultural self-awareness, sociolinguistic awareness, and knowledge of other peoples' cultural viewpoints. These attitudes stimulate the development of skills, including listening, interpreting, analyzing, and relating. These skills are crucial for effective intercultural communication (Dearsdorff, 2013). For example, de Hei et al. (2019) found that effective interaction involved proactiveness, politeness, flexibility in communication style, and investment in relationships. Students who demonstrate these behaviors can positively influence their team members' work and contribute to a smoother collaboration process. Furthermore, a positive collaborative process can lead to the development of intercultural communication, building commitment, and enthusiasm for diversity (de Hei et al., 2020).

Empirical studies consistently highlight the practical importance and developmental pathways of ICC for international students. Referring to the triangular model of ICC, a study conducted by Sarwari et al. (2024) provides empirical support for the core principles of Chen and Starosta's (1996) Triangular Model. Sarwari, et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of 45 papers published between 2000 and 2023 highlighting the critical importance of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) in the 21st century. The review revealed that ICC is essential for success in various aspects of modern life, especially in education and international business. The key components of ICC identified in the review include cultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity, language proficiency, empathy, flexibility, adaptation, social integration, communication effectiveness, and host culture acknowledgment. The review also explored factors influencing ICC development, such as international collegiate environments, engaging in available online materials and activities, and the availability of interactions among individuals from diverse backgrounds, enabling individuals to improve their ICC (Sarwari et al., 2024).

To highlight the importance of ICC, Sarwari, et al. (2024) synthesized ICC as a skill and a general capacity that must be sharpened in this globalized world. Hence, the factors enhancing the level of human's ICC have become a concern of language research for these past few years (Sarwari et al., 2024). Specifically, Arasaratnam-Smith (2016) has highlighted the crucial role of language proficiency in facilitating ICC and successful academic outcomes for international students. The study examined whether individuals proficient in more than one language scored higher in ICC compared to monolingual individuals. It was found that multilingual individuals' scores are significantly higher in ICC than the monolingual students. This suggests that exposure to multiple languages may enhance individuals' cognitive abilities and flexibility, contributing to their capacity for effective and appropriate communication in intercultural

settings. The results from this study also suggest that learning a second (or third) language in and of itself is advantageous for developing ICC.

Furthermore, a study by Bal and Savas (2020) explored the understanding of intercultural competence among state school English language teachers in Turkey. The teachers in the study emphasized that interculturally competent language learners should be open to other cultures, eager to learn and demonstrate empathy and respect. In addition, interculturally competent teachers need to possess similar characteristics and to integrate intercultural competence into language classes (Bal & Savas, 2020).

Building upon these findings, Wang et al. (2022) have shown that open-mindedness plays a crucial role in cultivating intercultural communication competence (ICC), especially in the context of overseas study programs. The research investigated the link between open-mindedness and ICC development among Australian healthcare students participating in short-term overseas programs. The study revealed a significant correlation between open-mindedness and cultural skills, a key component of ICC. The researchers found that open-minded students were more actively engaged in cultural immersion, demonstrating a willingness to learn from peers and embrace new challenges (Wang et al., 2022).

Beyond specific attributes, empirical research consistently highlights the practical importance of ICC for international students and effective strategies for improving it. Bittinger et al., (2021) investigated intercultural competence (ICC) development in first-year students participating in a multi-stage program combining study abroad in Peru and on-campus components. ICC is defined as involving cognitive, affective (attitude), and behavioral (skills) domains, and the findings highlighted growth in the affective dimension, which can be seen in the attitudes of openness and curiosity. On the behavioral dimension, students improve the ability to initiate conversation with local people abroad and show increased confidence and action-taking on intercultural interactions when beginning college back on campus. The study concluded that ICC helps students experience and value their own growth in effectively dealing with culturally different others. Also, intentional design, mentorship, and sustained cross-cultural interaction were crucial for fostering this ICC growth. This finding is in line with the study from (Kartika et al., 2024) stating that ICC helps newcomer-students to adapt with the new sociocultural environment in the country they reside. Students lacking of ICC lead to negative cultural experiences such as shock, confusions, and stress which affect their low esteem.

Another strategy to facilitate the development of ICC has been revealed in a three-year study conducted by Senyshyn (2019). It examined the effectiveness of a specialized first-year seminar course designed to support the academic and social integration of international students at a US university. The study involved 58 first-semester international students, predominantly from China. The study revealed that the seminar, which included an out-of-class engagement component with local students, significantly facilitated the development of intercultural communication competence (ICC) among the participants (Senyshyn, 2019). This finding underscores the importance of structured opportunities for intercultural engagement in promoting ICC. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Kokkonen and Natri (2024) reviewing that nowadays, more universities and higher educations have admitted that internationalisation needs ICC for successful communication with the peers coming from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences.

While previous studies effectively demonstrate the importance of ICC and ICC development in structured programs and Western academic contexts, there is a recognized gap in understanding how individual students cultivate ICC within diverse, non-Western international university environments. Therefore, this paper aims to explore and describe how an Egyptian student at an International University in Indonesia cultivates her ICC throughout her multicultural experiences.

This study will contribute to the existing literature on Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC). It provides an in-depth insight into the experiences of an Egyptian student who has complexities of language learning and cultural adaptation in an international university in Indonesia. The Egyptian student, Nubia, is a pseudonym in this study. By examining the extent to which cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of Nubia facilitate the development of her ICC, the study will offer valuable insights into the aspects that contribute to successful intercultural adjustment for international students. The findings will have practical implications for educators, institutions, and policymakers in designing programs and initiatives that support the integration and academic success of international students.

## **METHOD**

This study is a narrative inquiry that investigates the development of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) in an Egyptian student named Nubia (pseudonym) enrolled in an undergraduate program at an international university in Indonesia. Nubia was selected as a purposive sampling strategy. She was chosen for her characteristics that offered a rich case for exploring ICC development within the Indonesian context. She is a 21-year-old freshman and has been residing in Indonesia and attending the international university for one semester. The selection criteria included: 1) being an international student in Indonesia who has a different cultural background (Egyptian) to ensure potential for significant cultural adjustment and intercultural learning; 2) being in the early stages of her academic journey (freshman, one semester in) to capture initial and ongoing ICC development; and 3) demonstrating observable indicators of active engagement with the host culture. While the university hosts a diverse student body, including students from Myanmar, Korea, and Afghanistan, Nubia demonstrated notable progress in ICC, shown by her rapid language acquisition in Bahasa Indonesia, active engagement in social interactions with Indonesian speakers, and a positive attitude towards Indonesian culture.

Data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews which were conducted in English. Two interviews were conducted with Nubia, each lasting approximately 40 minutes. The blueprint of the interview questions is as follows:

**Table 1.** Blueprint of the Interview Questions

Dimensions	Indicators
Cognitive: Intercultural Awareness	Employing conscious efforts to learn about the host culture, such as seeking information, asking questions, and reflecting on experiences
	Recognizing the influence of culture on communication styles, including verbal and nonverbal patterns
	Recognizing the similarities and differences between one's own culture and the host culture
Affective: Intercultural Sensitivity	Expressing open-mindedness and a willingness to accept and appreciate different cultural perspectives and practices
	Suspending judgment and avoiding negative stereotypes about people from different cultures
	Expressing confidence in one's ability to interact effectively in the host culture
	Expressing interest in and enjoyment of learning about and experiencing the host culture
Behavioral (Intercultural Effectiveness/Adroitness)	Using the host language effectively to communicate basic needs and engage in social interactions.
	Sharing personal information and cultural experiences appropriately to build relationships and enhance understanding
	Adapting communication style to different social situations and cultural norms.

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Effectively managing conversational flow, turn-taking, and other interactional aspects
Demonstrating empathy and understanding towards people from different cultures
Maintaining one's own cultural identity while respecting the identities of others

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While conducting the interviews, the interviews were audio-recorded and later subsequently transcribed verbatim. The data analysis involved thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to the research question.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The findings of this study highlight how Nubia cultivated her Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) during her first semester at an international university in Indonesia. Drawing on Chen and Starosta's (1996) Triangular Model of ICC, the analysis reveals Nubia's growth across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.

#### Cognitive Dimension (Intercultural Awareness)

Based on the interview, Nubia's first cognitive aspect of ICC is seen in her developing understanding of Indonesian culture as she has been actively seeking information virtually even before she came to Indonesia. She was sure that having prior understanding helped her to have better readiness to strive for her life abroad in Indonesia. By the time she arrived in Indonesia, she reflected on her initial knowledge about Indonesia and observed the real-time exposures. One thing that awed her was the housing style in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, where she is currently studying in.

"At first, because I looked at a lot of photos before I came here, like on Google. There are a lot of natural views like this and like some people I don't know how to say this but maybe the houses are not that fancy like this. Then when I came here, no. I think yeah there's like buildings. When I came here to Jakarta and then when I asked, they say yeah there are parts there that have villages so the house is not like the capital city here in Jakarta like this. I thought it's like a more simple life. I mean for the economy for this stuff but when I came here yeah I just see it differently, like there's high buildings and a lot of beautiful places like I mean from the technology side, I thought it's less. I thought it's...But yeah, it surprised me. It's the opposite, totally. Because I didn't come here for that. It's okay, because in Egypt also we have, there is parts, not all Egypt, but parts have the same also a life level let's say like this um and I was like prepared it's okay like I wasn't have any problem because I already uh live in this part also in this level so yeah it wasn't a problem for me."

From what Nubia shared in the interview session, it is found that Nubia observed how Indonesia looked like either in the village sector or in the remote areas where most houses were not luxurious but tiny and simple. Meanwhile, Nubia found that her real-time experience in Jakarta led her to the countless views of numerous luxurious buildings and skyscrapers which could be easily spotted. In other words, what she found in Indonesia was greater than her initial expectations based on online research before she came to Indonesia. This exposure helped Nubia to learn that Indonesia is like Egypt as it has varying levels of economic development. The environment shown in the housing styles drove her to the familiar society like in Egypt.

Secondly, Nubia discovered the linguistic similarities between Indonesian and Egyptians. From the interview it was found that Nubia was surprised to discover the frequency of Arabic words used in Bahasa Indonesia.

"Many words are similar and the same, yeah. But actually, I don't use them as much now. I just hear them. *Mungkin*, for example, the word *mungkin*. *Mungkin* is Arabic. If you speak in Arabic with our people, they understand. That's how I understand. They just randomly said it and then I was like, yeah, it's an Arabic word. And then I asked my friends, is *mungkin* meaning possible or like this? I say, yes, it's an Arabic word.

As mentioned above, some words in Arabic are similarly used in Bahasa Indonesia, both in the terms and the meanings. Other than the example mentioned by Nubia, words that can be used interchangeably in both Arabic and Bahasa Indonesia are *dunia* in Bahasa Indonesia and

*dunia* in Arabic which means worlds in English. She also identified other words like *kursi* (chair), *roh kudus* (holy spirit), *badan* (body), *batin* (mind), and *musim* (season) as examples of the shared words. This linguistic similarity facilitated her initial understanding of basic conversations and religious discourse while engaging in conversations with her friends from Indonesia.

In addition to that, Nubia noted that not only the words, but the sentence structure of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic are also alike because both languages follow the subject-verb-object pattern. The example was: *Saya makan nasi* (I eat rice), where "saya" is the subject, "makan" is the verb, and "nasi" is the object which has a similar pattern with the sentence structure performed in Arabic. Even though the example does not mention the Arabic sentence, Nubia has the confidence that Bahasa Indonesia pattern is way more like Arabic and a bit different from the English pattern. For example, "I have a red car" translated to Bahasa Indonesia as "*Saya punya mobil merah.*" In Arabic, the noun is put before the adjective as in Bahasa Indonesia, while in English the adjective must come first before the noun. By looking at the shared words and the similar verbal patterns, Nubia has become more familiar with the culture she has been exposed to in Indonesia.

Furthermore, as an international student in Indonesia, Nubia recognized that the culture in Indonesia has influenced the religions in Indonesia where there have been more varieties compared to the religions in Egypt. Nubia was surprised as Indonesia has six religions, while Egypt only has two religions which are Christians and Muslims.

"About the culture impression, for me, I have my culture in Egypt. It doesn't have a lot of uh religions. We have Christians and Muslims in Egypt. That's why when I came here I heard that there are a lot of um religions like uh people who worship Buddha, Hindu. Because this stuff I just watched on the television. So, at first this shocked me. But then I realized, yeah, I just have to just accept all people. It's okay. Because, you know, it's hard if you were raised in a place, and just suddenly come to another place that has the opposite, to see the opposite of your...uh morals that you raised sometimes it shocks you."

This understanding initially shocked her as she had to recognize numerous other religions that she had never known before. Besides, she also needs to learn to live with the communities of those religions. By living in such different societies, Nubia has acquired a new social skill leading her to a conscious effort to accept and respect different beliefs.

### **Affective Dimension (Intercultural Sensitivity)**

The first key personal attribute of affective dimension discovered in Nubia's experiences was open-mindedness. According to the interview data, Nubia exhibited open-mindedness by showing her willingness to embrace Indonesian culture. This is shown in Nubia's non-judgmentalness by accepting cultural practices that are different from her own culture. For instance, she observed men wearing makeup, a phenomenon uncommon in Egypt, and though initially surprised, she came to accept it as part of Indonesia's cultural diversity.

"For example, here I see a man but he's too girly. I don't know what to call this. So, I see them here like putting on makeup. And I was like ... oh it shocks me because I didn't see this in Egypt. The scene itself is not comfortable to me. You know at first it was very shocking. Oh my god. He is like sitting normally in front of people like this. Because usually man is a man in Egypt and girl is a girl. It cannot be the opposite. I was raised like this. Yeah, so that's why when I came here, I was shocked I was talking to my mom. She said, just be normal, accept all people. So, now even if I found some boys that have a little bit different attitude, I was like accepting "it okay it's okay". yeah, it happens yeah just treat everyone equally yeah at first it was very hard. At first it was very hard. This was a shock for me also."

Although such experience drove her in confusion for the first time, yet she managed herself to avoid making any negative stereotypes about people in different cultures. Despite the shocking things she found in Indonesia, Nubia found enjoyment in learning Bahasa Indonesia, particularly in discovering the shared vocabulary with Arabic. As an international student, she had to stay in the university dormitory and shared a room with mostly Indonesian students and some other foreign students. Therefore, she had opportunities to practice speaking with Indonesians. Whenever she found difficulties, she sought opportunities to practice and learn

from her roommates and classmates. Similar things also happened in Nubia's *Bahasa Indonesia* course as she elaborated in the interview session.

"I explained *keluargaku*, some information about myself, *pakaian tradisional dari Mesir*, *makanan tradisional dari Mesir*, and even *musim*. *Musim* is an Arabic word. This is the stuff that I fully present in Bahasa Indonesia for my final project. The teacher said to me the way you expressed the photos is excellent because I was careful to put my presentation just photos. I didn't put any words, just to fully speak and get the grade. I really practiced so hard for this."

Throughout her *Bahasa Indonesia* class, she believed that the class played a key role in developing her language skills. Shown in her sharing at the interview, as a foreign student, she showed active and brilliant efforts to get an excellent score in Bahasa Indonesia class. For the final project, which focuses on Indonesian cultural elements, she delivered a presentation entirely in Indonesian and eventually received positive feedback on her performance. Another thing to note, Nubia found that the class provided such supportive environment that has increased her enjoyment in developing her ICC, as she confirmed in the following statement.

"The teacher said the way you were speaking was so good. She really appreciated that in my presentation I didn't put any sentences in my slides. That's why she said my grade and final project was good"

Because Nubia loved using Indonesian language, during her first semester in Indonesia, she actively sought opportunities to practice it. For example, she attended seminars without English translations. This proactive approach enhanced her vocabulary and understanding of the language.

"I usually learn from the seminars we hear. There are different meetings. They teach us about something. Then I notice what they are talking about. There are some of them that don't provide English translation."

Nubia also demonstrated a strong awareness of her own learning process, reflecting on her strengths and weaknesses.

"The needed one I learn from the experience first that oh I yes, I really need to study this. And then I asked my friends to write it for me and then I practiced and memorized it."

Referring to the statement above, Nubia recognized the need to improve her pronunciation and actively sought feedback. Therefore, when encountering unfamiliar words, she asked for clarification and actively practiced pronunciation and memorization. She relied on social interaction, engaging friends to help her write down new words. By doing this, she also developed her ICC by keep socializing with her friends having different first languages. Also, looking at how Nubia tried her best to engage in the use of Indonesian language, it clearly shows how she has such excellent confidence to interact with the hot culture.

Getting deeper to Nubia's enjoyment in learning, as Nubia gradually improved her skills of using Indonesian language, she expressed a strong desire to understand and adapt to Indonesian culture. She has an interest in engaging with the local community and potentially interacting with Indonesians in a social setting. As an evidence, she went to a local church as she is a Christian and she has an effort to integrate into a local community. Also, Nubia displayed an appreciation for Indonesian value. As a freshman, she attended the flag ceremony on campus during Independence Day. As she listened to the Indonesian Independence Day songs, she started to like the tone and when she visited shopping malls around that day, she listened to the song repeatedly and it made her remember the tone. All of these personal interests drove her to bravely consider staying in Indonesia after graduation.

"I don't know what God's plan for me is. But if God wants me to work here with the experience that I got from this university, I will totally say yes yeah because I have a lot of. If God really needs me to stay here to teach someone or to serve someone, I cannot say no. I will follow yeah. I don't mind if I stay in Indonesia for God's purpose."

Not only her wanting to stay in Indonesia, but she also had the extended desire to give back to the community. She had a deep connection to the country and a willingness to contribute based on her positive experiences. Moreover, Nubia expressed appreciation for Indonesian cuisine, highlighting her enjoyment of local dishes like *nasi goreng* and *soto*. She also mentioned local sweets, such as *martabak*, *dadar gulung*, and fried bananas or *pisang goreng*. Yet, some differences appear that it helped her to see how cultures are lived differently.

"I like... food of course the top one, nasi goreng, is the best, yeah and soto. And I don't remember the others. There are a lot but I cannot remember the name. At first, I didn't like the rice because it's very different from ours. Here it is more sticky but in Egypt it is more cooked. So you can see the seed one by one right. If someone in Egypt makes rice like this here in Indonesia, especially if it's a girl, they say you cannot be a good wife."

Nubia realized that there were differences in taste and cooking styles. She stated that she had never found fried bananas in Egypt, and the way people cook rice in Indonesia was very different from what she had in Egypt. Despite that, she tried to adjust and tried to engage with the local food culture. Once again, she showed how she became open-minded to adapt with the new country she has been residing. Besides all the enjoyment Nubia found in learning any similarities between Indonesian and Egyptian cultures, Nubia also learned to recognize some differences such as in word pronunciation.

"Yeah, for me even um let's say the pronunciation is not the same, yeah there's a little bit different pronunciation. I mean also for the alphabet it's like there's some letters so hard to pronounce like -ng because it's not familiar in my alphabet but there's a lot of words it's Arabic so that's why I was challenged, okay I will learn."

Of course, the differences must be a more-challenging thing instead of accepting the similarities. Yet, Nubia's answer illustrated her positive feeling towards any difficulties. This linguistic challenges fueled her motivation to learn and made the process engaging and enjoyable. By turning something difficult into a positive experience can be taken into another evidence how open-minded and non-judgmental Nubia is as a newcomer in Indonesia.

### **Behavioral Dimension (Intercultural Adroitness)**

One of the aspects found in behavioural dimension is message skill. Nubia showcased developing message skills while she was communicating in Indonesian language. She was able to use vocabulary acquired from various sources to communicate her needs and engage in social interactions as expressed in her answer at the interview session.

"So, there's one time I ordered a Grab car but it came with a motorcycle and then he just called me. I was like I'm outside and then he said he's a motorcycle. I just don't understand anything, just the motorcycle word. Yeah but I understand what he's talking about because he just says something I don't remember but he's saying like he's waiting outside with the motorcycle I was like, *No, tidak mau. Saya mau mobil*. Because I know *saya mau* and *mobil*."

To make it clearer, Nubia elaborated how she recognized the need for specific vocabulary based on practical situations in her everyday life.

"So before I even take Bahasa Indonesia class, I have to learn the sentence, even though I don't, I have to memorize it, even though I don't know the grammar, what is the every word meaning, but I just try, like, *saya mau, ya, saya tidak mau pedas, ya, saya mau* like this, *tidak pedas*, like this, *ya. Saya mau tidak pedas*. So, when I really, in this division, that I need to express something, I just know, yeah, I need to learn this so I can use it next time.

Referring to the situation above, Nubia successfully communicated with a Grab driver using limited vocabulary of Indonesian language to clarify her preference for a car over a motorcycle. From the case, she showed that she was able to apply the learned vocabulary in real-life scenarios even though it was not in complete constructed sentences.

It is also worth remembering that Nubia engaged in appropriate self-disclosure. She happily shared information about her cultural background and personal experiences with her Indonesian friends and classmates. She readily discussed her Egyptian heritage, her family, and her reasons for choosing to study in Indonesia. She explained that her decision to study in Indonesia was influenced by the suggestion of a Korean missionary who recommended the international university in Indonesia to her family. Her family saw this as a valuable opportunity for her personal and professional growth. They believed that international experience would be beneficial for her future career prospects. They also believed that employment opportunities might be more readily available for foreigners in other countries, even without extensive prior

work experience. Nubia received a full scholarship to study at the university, which covered her accommodation and meals, but did not include a monthly allowance from her parents.

As a foreign student in Indonesia, Nubia also displayed behavioral flexibility by adapting her communication style to different social contexts. Although she naturally spoke with a higher volume and faster pace, she recognized the need to adjust to the Indonesian communication norms and actively worked on being more calm and less overreacted.

“I was, like, overreacted but I think it was great. But now I try, like, to be more calm and you know, making my voice slowly or doesn't sound like much is hard for me. So I tried to be more calm. I think yeah I think the environment around me is like this, especially in classes or if there is a meeting if I want to whisper. even my whispering is high. I tried my best. Yeah, to adjust, of course.”

Also, Nubia stated how she added non-verbal aspects throughout her cultural communication experiences.

“Egypt uses a lot of facial expressions, and we usually use hands and people understand us without talking ah. Here also I have like this sense of humour like to know oh yeah, she means this, or they may be saying something, and they don't want me to notice or like this I try to notice this by time yeah or using eyebrows yeah to express their feelings. So, I started to realize. This is me, and that is like this.”

As social interaction is hardly separated from non-verbal communication, Nubia highlighted the value of nonverbal communication in understanding social cues and building relationships. She also observed and interpreted non-verbal cues like facial expressions and hand gestures in Indonesia and learned to understand their meanings in the Indonesian context.

Besides adapting to communication style, the next aspect revealed was the interaction management skill. Nubia developed interaction management skills by engaging in conversations and navigating social situations. She actively participated in class discussions to express her opinions and uses humour to connect with her peers.

“I used words like *Jangan ya dek ya* in class. Actually, it is also Trend on Tiktoks. Tiktok is in Bahasa Indonesia. So, there's also some funny ones like tik tok trends and I just copy because it's so funny like after I know the meaning, I just know the word. It's from tiktok, but I love the words.”

While talking about the Trend phrases on Tiktoks, Nubia also shared how she learned to use slangs from her peers in such careful manners. She stated as follows:

“At first, yeah, I remember second class with him [Nubia's peer]. We were trying to get to know each other in our class, and he was like to teach me some words in Bahasa Indonesia. He says, if you learn this you will not sound like too much foreigners, you'll know the slang words. He teaches me very bad words first. Like, yeah, like dog and dog dog sometimes *anjing* yeah sometimes they say. It's normal, but it was really what we usually like to say when we are mad of something. *Anjing*, and there is a word, same pronunciation, but has an r at the end.”

By analyzing Nubia's statements about how she took slangs and humors while engaging in cultural communication with her peers, it shows how such participation sharpened her ability to manage conversations and interactions appropriately. In other words, Nubia's interactions with classmates and teachers were crucial in facilitating her cultural adjustment. She was able to learn from her Indonesian peers, picking up slang and colloquialisms. It further enriches her understanding of the language's nuances. She is even able to say it carefully since she has the knowledge that the slang word might be negative.

Lastly, Nubia's description about the interactions revealed her developing social skills, particularly empathy and identity maintenance. While she encountered instances where Indonesian students primarily speak Bahasa Indonesia in group settings, she expressed her discomfort and the need for inclusivity. She stated:

“It's not bad but it's bother me if I'm in Indonesian group or something, they prefer to speak in Bahasa and just forget about English just really bother me because we are in international society so we have to be more aware about like the feelings of the other is not because I'm the only not international student so you speak in Bahasa in group. For example, if we meet that group for any kind of reason so they just send a lot of things and then when we meet, yeah why didn't you do this? I say why you didn't say anything to me. Even though I translate I know what they are talking about but they don't even put effort into translating what they say in group. So that's really bothering me also because I feel it's so disrespectful right yeah.”

From Nubia's answer above, it is shown how She believed that all students must be aware of the importance of empathy and inclusivity in intercultural communication because they were in intercultural settings. Not only she expressed her needs, but she also expressed her awareness that respects must be highly taken into consideration while being engaged in intercultural environments.

## **Discussion**

This study focuses on Nubia's intercultural communication competence development during her first semester at an international university in Indonesia in the lens of Chen and Starosta's (1996) Triangular Model of ICC. Therefore, this study also emphasized the need for a holistic approach to developing ICC, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Nubia's experience demonstrates that effective intercultural communication requires not only knowledge and skills but also a genuine desire to connect with people from different cultures and a willingness to adapt one's behaviour accordingly.

First, the findings focus on the cognitive dimension of ICC. Represented by intercultural awareness, this aspect became increasingly evident in the Egyptian student's experiences. As she interacted with Indonesian peers and engaged in social activities, her understanding of Indonesian cultural patterns and communication nuances deepened. This aligns with Chen and Starosta's (1996) emphasis on recognizing and comprehending cultural differences as a crucial aspect of intercultural competence. Nubia's active efforts to learn Indonesian language, recognizing its different sentence structure, further demonstrate her commitment to developing this dimension of ICC. While Nubia's proactive efforts, such as understanding grammatical structures and seeking information virtually before arriving in Indonesia, illustrate a deliberate cognitive effort beyond mere exposure to the language or culture. This cognitive development of ICC aligns with findings by Lee et al. (2023). Nubia's active pursuit of cultural knowledge directly contributed to her intercultural awareness. It reinforces the idea that such intentional cognitive engagement is vital for developing this aspect of ICC. Also, referring to Nubia's active and proactive efforts in acquiring related informations and knowledge shown in this study has positively confirmed Arasaratnam-Smith's belief (2016) stating that motivation is a crucial engine to enhance the individual's cognitive aspect in ICC.

Second, the affective dimension, represented by intercultural sensitivity, played a significant role in Nubia's study in Indonesia. She has a positive attitude towards cultural differences which can be seen from her willingness to embrace new experiences and adapt her communication style. For example, Nubia actively sought opportunities to practice Indonesian language, such as attending seminars without English translations. This proactive approach enhanced her vocabulary and understanding of the language. This finding aligns with Senyshyn (2019), who revealed that one strategy to facilitate the development of ICC is through first-year seminar courses. The study revealed that the seminar, which included an out-of-class engagement component with local students, significantly facilitated the development of intercultural communication competence (ICC). Also, as Nubia improved her Bahasa Indonesia proficiency, she had opportunities to engage with the local community and potentially interact with Indonesians in a social setting. This is in line with Chen (2014) and Barker (2016) who mentioned that language proficiency is fundamental for navigating intercultural interactions and conveying messages effectively.

On top of that, the affective dimension seems to be the most dominant aspect found since Nubia shows a lot of enjoyment of learning and experiencing cultural things and activities in Indonesia. It is in line with Chen and Starosta (1996) who highlighted the importance of affective behaviour. The open mindedness found also plays a significant role to her ICC. Despite initial challenges with adjusting her communication style, Nubia remained open-minded and focused on accepting others and adapting to the new environment.

The dominant affective ICC skill found in Nubia agrees with Bittinger et al., (2021)'s study. The findings highlighted growth in the affective dimension, which can be seen in the attitudes of openness and curiosity. In Bittinger et al., (2021)'s study, students made more intentional efforts to leave their comfort zone, thus they were able to move into a learning zone and discover their abilities to adapt to new experiences. They also, through mentorship and reflection, learned that by being mindful and gaining a better understanding of those different from them, they could suspend judgment and work through differences in a positive manner. This is in line with how Nubia demonstrated non-judgmentalness by accepting cultural practices that are different from her own culture. For instance, Nubia experienced culture shock and discomfort, directly linked to her upbringing and contrasting cultural expectations as she observed men wearing makeup. It was a phenomenon uncommon in Egypt. As she received her Mom's advice and ongoing exposure to the Indonesian environment, Nubia progressed to show a significant shift towards open-mindedness and acceptance. This shows a clear development within her affective dimension of intercultural communication competence.

Third, Nubia's experiences clearly demonstrate the development of several key behavioral skills, consistent with both Chen and Starosta's (1996) framework and aspects of Deardorff's (2013) model of intercultural competence. Nubia's experience also aligns with Bittinger et al.'s (2021) findings, which indicate that students improve their ability to initiate conversations with local people abroad and show increased confidence and action-taking in intercultural interactions.

Nubia's way of acquiring practical vocabulary portrays her developing message skills and behavioral flexibility. For instance, she specifically recalled her interaction with a Grab driver: "No, *tidak mau; Saya mau mobil.*" This highlights her ability to apply learned vocabulary in real-life scenarios, effectively conveying her needs despite a language barrier. She emphasized her self-driven effort to acquire such phrases: "*So before I even take Bahasa Indonesia class, I have to learn the sentence... I just try, like, saya mau, ya, saya tidak mau pedas, ya... I need to learn this so I can use it next time.*" This shows an intentional recognition of and response to the need for specific language skills in everyday situations. Also, it reflects strong message skills and a proactive approach to overcoming language barriers.

Despite coming from a different cultural background, Nubia's openness about her background shows self-disclosure, and her attention to nonverbal cues demonstrates her developing understanding of intercultural interactions. Furthermore, Nubia's active participation in class, use of humor, and engagement with slang also highlight her emerging interaction management skills. For instance, Nubia recounted, "*I used words like: Jangan ya dek ya in class. Actually, it is also Trend on Tiktok in Bahasa Indonesia.*" The engagement and adoption of local informal expressions and humor highlight Nubia's ability to manage conversations appropriately and build rapport within her new environment. These examples provide concrete evidence that Deardorff's (2013) behavioral skills are essential for effective intercultural communication and adaptation. Nubia's actions, such as her communication and flexibility, also reflect the behaviors identified by de Hei et al. (2019) as crucial elements for successful intercultural communication.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the development of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) in an Egyptian student, Nubia during her first semester at an international university in Indonesia. The analysis employed Chen and Starosta's (1996) Triangular Model of ICC. The findings provide empirical support for the core principles of the Triangular Model. It was revealed that there was significant growth across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. In the cognitive dimension, Nubia actively sought to understand Indonesian culture, including linguistic similarities and religious diversity. In the affective dimension, she

demonstrated open-mindedness and a non-judgmental attitude, embracing new experiences and enjoying learning Bahasa Indonesia. Her behavioral development included improving her messaging skills in Bahasa Indonesia, adapting her communication style, and effectively managing social interactions. Nubia's experience underscores that ICC is a dynamic process influenced by personal experiences and interactions. It requires cognitive understanding, emotional sensitivity, and practical behavioral skills.

Based on these findings, several suggestions are offered to enhance ICC for international students. First, institutions should prioritize comprehensive language programs with opportunities for authentic communication and facilitate structured interactions between international and local students. Second, it is crucial for lecturers who teach international students to integrate intercultural communication strategies into their teaching, modeling effective communication and encouraging active listening and respectful dialogue on cultural differences. As this narrative inquiry provides only an in-depth understanding of one student's experience, future researchers may conduct similar studies by considering longitudinal designs with larger and more diverse groups to identify broader patterns in ICC development. Lastly, future researchers can also conduct comparative studies across different cultural contexts and explore how different environments influence the ICC.

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