The Role of Intercultural Communication Competence in Business Collaboration to Develop Start Ups in the Global Era

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ABSTRACT: In this global era, more and more startups are developing their businesses with partners from other regions or countries. However, intercultural cooperation that is not accompanied by intercultural communication competence will often create unresolved conflicts. This research is a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach. In this study, researchers wanted to dig up information about the experiences of informants in developing business partnerships and the difficulties encountered when communicating with business partners from different countries or regions. Data collection was carried out using unstructured interviews so that the informants could be more flexible in sharing their experiences when starting their business development. They can also tell freely about any cultural background conflicts that are often encountered when discussing or communicating with business partners from different cultures. In this study, researchers interviewed 10 informants consisting of start-up actors, who have been in business for more than 5 years and have collaborated with business partners from other regions or countries. This is to dig up information about their experiences when communicating with these business partners and to get data on what obstacles start-ups experience when collaborating with their business partners. The results of this study indicate that Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), which consists of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects, is needed by start-ups, especially if they want to develop their business by working with domestic and foreign partners. With the existence of ICC, start-up actors can avoid ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, as well as language barriers and differences in values.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), Business Collaboration, Start Up

INTRODUCTION

Data obtained in 2018 shows that more than 120 people have used the internet in Indonesia and if Indonesia is a country that is classified as very fast in using the internet, it can be ranked 6th in

the world ([Bouwman et al., 2019](#); [Prastya Nugraha & Wahyuhastuti, 2017](#)). This increase has an impact on various sectors including the industrial sector, education, economy and others. The use of the internet also makes a very large contribution to the growth of small businesses in Indonesia, which are known as "start ups" or small businesses that have just been started and are still looking for a target market that is supported by information and communication ([Fisher, 2015](#); [Ries, 2017](#)). Start-ups that are growing in Indonesia include Tokopedia, Bukalapak, Ruang Guru and many others.

The potential of the digital industry in Indonesia cannot be underestimated. Currently, there are around 202.6 million internet users and 98.2% are smartphone users in Indonesia. This is a big capital for Indonesia to develop e-commerce and digital technology-based businesses in the country. The volume of e-commerce business in Indonesia is predicted to reach USD 124 billion in 2025. On the other hand, one of the supporting factors that determines the progress of a country is the number of entrepreneurs. Until 2018, the number of entrepreneurs in Indonesia only reached 3.1% of the total population. Seeing this fact, Indonesia actually has the opportunity to create an entrepreneurial nation by utilizing digital technology that will host it in its own country.[1]

The development of the internet world in Indonesia is increasing rapidly and currently there are even 202.6 million internet users in Indonesia, of which 98% are smartphone users. The development of the number of internet users is an asset for Indonesia in building an e-commerce business which is predicted to reach USD 124 billion in 2025. the entrepreneur. However, if you look at the current developments, we are optimistic that Indonesia will give birth to many entrepreneurs, especially in the form of start-ups managed by young people and these will be hosted in our country.

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (KOMINFO) also provides great support in expanding start-ups and one of the efforts is through the 1000 Start-Up National Movement which is supported by various companies in Indonesia. This effort is real support from the government and the private sector in realizing Indonesia to become The Digital Energy of Asia in 2020 by giving birth to 1,000 new start-ups. This is also one of the solutions for utilizing digital technology ([Digital, 2017](#)).

The presence of start-ups in Indonesia requires these start-ups to optimize their creativity in developing their business, such as in the service sector or also using innovative platforms. Not all start-ups in Indonesia are busy competing with each other, but many are also collaborating with fellow start-ups to produce various product innovations. Communication is the most important factor in business development. Empirical studies show that a manager will spend between 60% and 80% of their daily working time on communication. Meanwhile, negotiation is also an aspect that is taken into account in doing business.[2] However, the main problem faced by strat-up

managers today is in intercultural communication considering that the people who become business partners come from different cultures, different languages, so they bring different values. If it is not anticipated, this will trigger conflict between business people which also causes the business to grow in an unhealthy environment.

Many entrepreneurs still do not understand that to establish cooperation with companies from other countries or other regions requires qualified intercultural communication skills karena jika tidak konflik akan terus terjadi. Someone who has competence in intercultural communication will be able to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from different backgrounds because they have the motivation to communicate, adequate knowledge, appropriate communication skills, sensitivity and character (Kim, 2012; Samovar et al., 2014). Intercultural conflict cannot be taken lightly. Saying and acting rudely may be commonplace in one culture, extraordinary and contemptuous in another. Daily communication failures, misunderstandings due to differences in language, differences in cultural backgrounds, exclusive behavior because they feel expatriates, and other attitudes that are not in accordance with local cultural backgrounds can lead to prejudice and very likely end in open conflict which is fatal. (Samovar et al., 2014).

For the business context, many changes have occurred, especially since the rapid development information Technology. Business transactions can be carried out in minutes; exchange of information from different parts of the world happen every second. Professionals and entrepreneurs can anytime do contacts and make business trips to different countries. Unfortunately, the ability and intercultural communication skills for the smooth running of relationships and business are not all realized by business people. This is coupled with the very lack of communication training intercultural to overcome various intercultural barriers. Many business transaction failures occurs simply because of a failure in intercultural communication (Amia, 2014; Williams, 2005).

Based on the problems above, the researcher is interested in conducting this research to answer the questions (1) How do start-up entrepreneurs understand about intercultural communication and (2) What are the obstacles encountered in implementing intercultural communication in their business. The results of this study will contribute to start-up actors in Indonesia in particular and business people in general to better understand the importance of intercultural communication competence so that businesses can develop according to expectations.

Intercultural Communication
(Sari et al., 2019; Wood, 2013) defines culture as one of the most important systems in which communication emerges. We are not born knowing how, when, and to whom to speak, any more than we are born with attitudes about race, religion, sexual orientation, and other different aspects of identity. Intercultural communication can be interpreted as communication carried out by two or more people with different cultural backgrounds. Tobs and Moss (1996), quoted by (Ruliana, 2014), intercultural communication, communication between people of different cultures (both in terms of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic differences).

Guo-Ming Chen and William J. Starosta, quoted by (Liliweri, 2013), saying that a negotiation process will guide human behavior and limit them in carrying out their functions as a group. (Liliweri, 2013) assumes that intercultural communication theory is a set of statements that describe a valid environment in which intercultural communication theory can be applied. Meanwhile, according to (Martin & Nakayama, 2017; Mulyana, 2014), intercultural communication is a process of exchanging thoughts and meanings between people of different cultures.

From the definition above, the authors conclude that intercultural communication can be interpreted as communication that occurs between people who have different cultural backgrounds. There are several terms that are often equated with the term intercultural communication, including interethnic communication and international communication. Mc. Daniel mentions several potential problems that often occur in it, such as the search for similarities, withdrawal, anxiety, uncertainty reduction, stereotypes, prejudice, racism, power, ethnocentrism, and culture shock (Samovar et al., 2014).

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Obstacles in Intercultural Communication
There are three aspects that are considered to be the most capable of triggering intercultural problems or conflicts, namely language barriers, different values, and different cultural behavior patterns (Lewis Jr. & Wai, 2021; Mousa, 2016). Language barriers can be overcome by learning other people's languages, but when it comes to differences in values, this is a serious obstacle, especially because it can lead to misunderstandings in communication. Likewise with differences in behavior, this is quite a heavy factor because conflicts can be triggered if each group does not have the ability to respect the norms or habits of groups with different cultures.

Meanwhile, (Rahardjo, 2005; Turistiati, 2016) states that there are 3 factors that become obstacles in intercultural communication, namely ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice. Ethnocentrism is a condition in which a person feels that the culture they adhere to is better than other people's cultures. While stereotypes are generalizing certain groups which greatly simplify reality. Prejudice is always related to bad thoughts which are judgments that are not based on knowledge and testing of available information.

High Context Cultural (HCC) and Low Context Cultural (LCC)
In communicating, each individual has its own uniqueness, not only related to the topic of conversation but also the style of speech and non-verbal language. (Liliweri, 2013) conceptualizes

two orientations, namely High Context Cultural (HCC) and Low Context Cultural (LCC). HCC is characterized by a high level of communication, which means that most of its messages are implicit, indirect and not straightforward, or as many would say "stilted". Nonverbal behavior is especially important for people from countries with HCC where messages are conveyed implicitly and often differ in meaning from the verbal messages conveyed.

On the other hand, people from countries with LCC are characterized by a more explicit and forthright communication style. But the difference from HCC is that people with LCC always mean what they say. Indonesia itself is included in a culture with a high context and is in between Arabic and Chinese cultures. Meanwhile, countries with a low cultural context are Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavia, the United States, France, England, Italy, Spain, Greece, Arabic, China, and Japan (Mulyana, 2014).
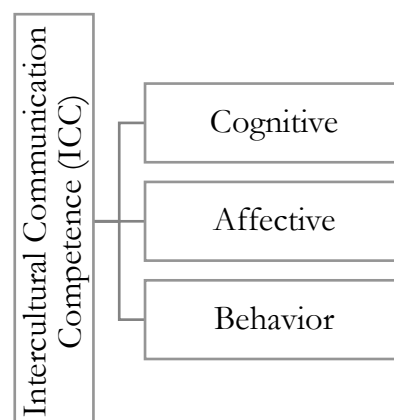
Intercultural Communication Competence
Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) is very important for every individual to have because it can direct us to carry out various communication behaviors effectively and appropriately, and can integrate various identities in different cultural environments (Chen, 2014). According to (Chen, 2014) individuals who have competence in intercultural communication must understand their own and other people's cultural values, must be able to show positive feelings when communicating with others, must respect and be able to appreciate differences and be able to behave appropriately and appropriate in social situations in context of intercultural interaction.

Intercultural communication can be interpreted as a person's ability to adapt from old habits to new habits and has the ability to manage the dynamics of differences and control pressure (Kim, 2012). Meanwhile, the three dimensions put forward by (Kim, 2012) related to the concept of intercultural communication are cognitive, affective and behavioral.

Figure 1
Three Dimensions of Intercultural Communication Communication (ICC)

Source: (Kim, 2012)

The cognitive dimension is a person's interpretation mechanism or structure that gives meaning to the message, the affective dimension refers to a person's motivation or desire to bridge different cultures, and the behavioral dimension is a person's ability to be flexible and clever in using his cognitive and affective skills.

Definition of Start Up
(Brikman, 2015) explains that a digital startup is a group of people who form an organization with the aim of building a startup that produces products in the technology sector. Start ups are intended to be able to enter the free market and reach consumers broadly without having to be limited by space and distance. Start-ups are also capable of disrupting large-scale businesses with conventional models into digital forms (Fisher, 2015). Meanwhile (Blank & Bob, 2012) explain that a startup is an organization that aims to find a business model in an uncertain situation.

(Ries, 2017) defines start-up as an institution designed to create products or services in the midst of uncertain conditions (Ries, 2017). The goal of start-ups is to find repeatable and scalable business models (Blank, 2014). From this definition it can be interpreted that a start-up is a company that is designed to find the right business model for the company so that it can survive in the midst of extreme uncertainty.

A study by analyzing 200 start-ups has been conducted by Bill Gross by examining successful start-ups and failed start-ups that are within the scope of the *idealab* and several start-ups that are outside the *idealab,* such as Uber, AirBnb, YouTube. The results of his research show that there are 5 aspects that determine the success of a start-up, namely time, team, ideas, business model, and funding (Arya et al., 2017; Gross, 2017). Out of 200 startups, 42% of their success is influenced by the right timing, then followed by the team factor of 32%, ideas 28%, business model 24% and funding 14%.

(Afdi & Purwanggono, 2017) explain that start-up is a model in business development with the aim of realizing rapid growth. When viewed from the growth in the number of start-ups in the world, data obtained from the Start-Up Ranking 2019 shows that the United States occupies the top position with 45,877 start-ups, followed by India with 5,768 start-ups. Indonesia is ranked 6th with a total of 1,939 start ups.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is an approach started by Edmund Husserl and developed by Martin Heidegger to understand or study human experience. This approach developed as a mature and mature qualitative research method during the decades of the 20th century. The general focus of this research is to examine/study the nature or structure of experience into human consciousness (Tuffour, 2017). According to (Alase, 2017) phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that allows researchers to implement and apply subjectivity and interpersonal skills in the exploratory research process. Second, the definition put forward by Creswell is cited by (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015) which states

that qualitative research is research that is interested in analyzing and describing the experiences of individual phenomena in the everyday world.

Phenomenology is very suitable for this research because this research aims to explore the experiences of informants in running start-up businesses, especially related to their abilities in intercultural communication and business development through collaboration. The purpose of this research is to answer the question of how start-up entrepreneurs understand the importance of intercultural communication and what obstacles are encountered in implementing intercultural communication in their business.

Phenomenology as a research method also has several advantages or advantages. First, as a scientific method, phenomenology can describe a phenomenon as it is, without manipulating the data in it. In conditions like this, we as researchers must first put aside our understanding of religion, customs, and science so that the knowledge and truth found is truly objective. Second, this method views the object of study as a whole and is not separate from other objects. That is, this approach emphasizes a holistic approach and is not partial in order to obtain a complete understanding of an object. From these advantages, phenomenological studies also have problems.

Data collection in this study was obtained using in-depth interviews, namely unstructured interviews, namely free interviews where the researcher did not use interview guidelines that had been arranged systematically and completely for data collection. (Sugiyono, 2020). This was intended so that the informants could freely share their experiences when starting cooperation with entrepreneurs from different countries or cultures. The interview guide used is only an outline of the problems to be asked.

In-depth interviews are used to obtain details about the phenomenon being studied. In this study, researchers interviewed 10 informants consisting of start-up actors, who have been in business for more than 5 years and have collaborated with business partners from other regions or countries. This is to dig up information about their experiences when communicating with these business partners and to get data on what obstacles start-ups experience when collaborating with their business partners.

The data obtained from these in-depth interviews were then analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to Smith quoted by (Bayir, 2016) there are several stages in science, namely: (1) reading and re-reading, (2) making initial notes, (3) developing emerging themes, (4) looking for connections across emerging themes, (5) move the next case, and (6) look for patterns across cases.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From interviews conducted by researchers with 10 start-ups, who have been running their businesses for more than 5 years, researchers gathered information regarding their experiences in

collaborating with their business partners. Data on start-ups and their business partners can be seen in table 1 below.

Table 1

Data on start-up entrepreneurs and collaborations

No	Start Up	City	Establishment	Business Partner
1.	Education	Jakarta	6 years	Medan
2.	Travel Agent	Jakarta	5 years	Medan
3.	Culinary	Manado	5 years	Jakarta
4.	Fast Food	Nusa Tenggara Timur	6 years	Jakarta
5.	Expedition	Jakarta	7 years	Medan
6.	Herbal Cosmetics	Bandung	5 years	USA
7.	Hijab and Muslim Fashion	Bandung	6 years	Makassar
8.	Batik Fashion	Yogyakarta	5 years	USA
9.	Sport Shoes	Jakarta	6 years	USA
10.	Accessories	Jakarta	6 years	USA

From the data obtained by researchers, it can be seen that start-up actors collaborate not only with domestic partners but also with overseas partners. Of the 10 start-up managers interviewed, 4 start-ups have successfully opened overseas branches, namely in Malaysia, Singapore and the USA. From the results of the interviews it was also known that at the start of collaboration there were many obstacles and difficulties in communicating with business partners faced by start-up actors due to cultural differences. The results of the interviews with researchers are summarized in table 2 below.

Table 2

Experience in Collaborating with Business Partners

No	Aspect		Experience of Start Up entrepreneurs with partners in different regions in Indonesia
1.	Obstacles faced		
	a.	Language	a. Misinterpretation often occurs when communicating orally and in writing b. Different intonations that lead to misunderstandings
	b.	Value Differences	Conflicts often arise when expressing opinions in communicating both orally and in writing
	c.	Etnocentrism	Both parties still consider their respective cultures to be the best
	d.	Stereotype	Many express stereotypes when communicating

	e.	Prejudice	There is always prejudice against business partners
	f.	High Context Culture (HCC) / Low Context Culture (LCC)	Differences in background in the cultural context often lead to misunderstandings in receiving messages which trigger conflicts
2.	Understanding of start-up entrepreneurs related to Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)		At the beginning of the collaboration: a. Do not have sufficient knowledge about the need for intercultural communication in business cooperation (Cognitive) b. Do not understand how to resolve conflicts that arise when communicating (Affective) c. Do not understand how to be more flexible in dealing with conflicts that arise in communication (Behavior)

The results of interviews with 10 start-ups indicated that in their early days of collaborating with business partners, they experienced many obstacles in communicating. This is caused by various things, the first is the problem of differences in language and values, as conveyed by the following informants.

> "I had a very bad experience in the early days of establishing business cooperation with partners from other provinces. Our communication is so bad that there are often misunderstandings. I am from Jakarta and intend to open a branch of our training institute in the Medan area. It seems that the difference between language and culture cannot be taken lightly. The high intonation of our partners, often causes me and my team to misunderstand because they think they are angry. In addition, they also always convey messages explicitly, without thinking about whether the other person feels offended or not." (AE - Training Center, Jakarta)

> "At the beginning I was going to collaborate with partners from Makassar, I found it very difficult to communicate with their team. Every time there was a meeting, they always dominated the conversation and always stated what they wanted explicitly without thinking about whether we felt offended or not. Their side always speaks in such a high tone that it seems patronizing." (TU- Hijab and Muslim Fashion, Bandung)

From the answers of the informants it is known that they experience problems in communicating caused by differences in language. People from Medan have a style of communicating in a loud,

loud voice and tend to use high intonation, so this often causes misunderstandings between those who are communicating. Misunderstandings in interpreting messages are often caused because the messenger (communicator) does not understand the cultural background of the recipient of the message (communicant) or uses the wrong channel or place where the message passes (Mulyana, 2011). In addition to problems in language, the problem of differences in values is also a trigger factor for intercultural conflict. This is also experienced by start-up actors in their early days of developing a business with collaboration.

> "I am a business actor in the culinary field, especially specialties from Manado, North Sulawesi. When our business has been running for three years, we intend to open a branch in Jakarta and look for business partners. To be honest, at that time I felt hopeless because several discussions with the Jakarta team made me sad and annoyed because our partners forbade us to open outlets in several places that we proposed on the grounds that most of the residents were Muslims so we had to find another location. Indeed, the food we sell is Manadonese food with the main ingredient being pork. " (RU-Manadonese Food, Manado)

Apart from differences in language, misunderstandings can also occur if the parties who are communicating have differences in the values they carry. From the opinion of the informants above, it is obtained data that Manado culinary entrepreneurs do not understand the values held by the people in the Jakarta area. The start-up entrepreneur from Manado insisted on opening an outlet in an area where there are a lot of Muslim residents, even though the food they sell contains pork. When communicating, it is felt that there is a difference in the values of the two parties. Differences in values are a serious obstacle to the emergence of cultural misunderstandings because when two people from different cultures interact, these differences will prevent reaching a rational agreement on important issues (Lewis Jr. & Wai, 2021).

Meanwhile, (Rahardjo, 2005) in (Samovar et al., 2014) suggests 3 important things encountered in intercultural communication, namely ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice. This is also experienced by start-up actors when starting their collaboration with partners from other regions.

> "At the beginning of collaborating with partners from Medan, I felt uncomfortable, because he always praised the praise of his region and the customs of other Medan people. He always said that we Medanese are always honest when we talk, we have nothing to hide, we can be trusted, Medanese people also have a great sense of solidarity. So go forward together, it's hard to bear the same. If the people of Jakarta live each, yes... it's very individual. I also often hesitate if I want to do business with Jakarta people. But over time I felt used to it…and even felt comfortable because every time there was a problem it was always discussed openly." (SS- Travel Agent, Jakarta)

From the answers of the informants above, we can find 3 aspects at once, namely the ethnocentrism of the sentence: "Medan people are always honest when they talk, there is nothing to hide, they can be trusted, Medan people also have a great sense of solidarity. So go forward together, it's hard to bear the same." We can also find aspects of stereotypes, namely in the sentence: "If Jakartans live their lives, they are...very individual." Meanwhile, the prejudice aspect is found in the sentence: "I also often doubt if I want to do business with Jakarta people." These three things are in accordance with (Samovar et al., 2014) statement which says that ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice are factors that can hinder intercultural communication.

In conducting intercultural communication, we also cannot be separated from the assessment of high context and low context culture. Start-up actors who collaborate with the United States have experienced this.

> "When I got an offer to work with a partner from the United States, I still doubted, is it possible? Moreover, I imagine there will be many difficulties later in the process. Apparently, after we had our first meeting, that feeling disappeared because I actually felt very comfortable and relaxed. The team from America who came were very friendly and forthright. His speaking style is also relaxed. Nothing is covered up. Everything is discussed in detail. They also asked us to speak frankly about what we want." (EN – Herbal Cosmetics, Bandung)

> "Wow, it's really exciting to work with Americans. Communication remained smooth even though they knew I wasn't very fluent in English but, they still wanted to collaborate. On first meeting, the impression I got was that Americans are very relaxed, not formal, respectful of others and not condescending. But they have a high commitment and everything must be written in detail in black and white." (AR-Batik Fashion, Yogyakarta)

The answers from the informants indicated that their partners from the United States had LCC (Low Context Culture). In a low-context culture, the messages to be conveyed between the communicator and the communicant are explicit and their meaning is already contained in the verbal communication. According to people who use this communication style, it is better to be explicit and speak directly to the point and not create ambiguity/double meaning (Martin & Nakayama, 2017).

From the interview results it is also known that Intercultural Communication Competence can be obtained by everyone as long as they are willing to learn so that they have sufficient knowledge (cognitive) before we visit different areas and interact with people with different backgrounds, must have high motivation to cooperate and enhance tolerance and eliminating ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice. Finally, how do we change behavior so that we are able to adapt to a new culture, because equipping ourselves with relevant knowledge, especially regarding how

culture influences communication, is one way to overcome conflicts and disputes between cultures (Mulyana, 2014).

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), which consists of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects, is very much needed by start-up actors, especially if they want to develop their business in collaboration with domestic and foreign partners. By having ICC, start-up actors can avoid ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, as well as language barriers and differences in values. By having ICC, misunderstandings in communication can also be avoided. By having intercultural communication competence, conflict can also be avoided because each individual has a high sense of tolerance and can appreciate differences.

The limitation of this research is that it does not discuss in detail how someone can improve their ability in intercultural communication so that for further research, the researcher suggests conducting research that focuses on ways or strategies to improve intercultural communication competence.

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