

Conflict Management of Indonesian Students in China From the Perspective of Face-Negotiation Theory

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ABSTRACT

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Indonesian students studying in China often encounter challenges adapting to their new environment, including cultural misunderstandings with peers and lecturers. Consequently, they must effectively navigate conflicts to address these issues. These challenges arise from cultural disparities, such as a highly efficient payment system and impeccably clean surroundings, which contribute to culture shock. Additionally, differences in natural environments influence cultural variations. This research investigates how Indonesian students manage conflicts stemming from their intercultural experiences in China, utilizing the Face-Negotiation Theory as a theoretical framework. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through interviews with three Indonesian students enrolled in Chinese universities. The findings reveal that language barriers exacerbate misunderstandings between Indonesian and Chinese students. Furthermore, Indonesian students tend to employ avoidance and compromise as conflict management strategies when resolving intercultural communication issues.

1. Introduction

Human acquisition of effective communication skills, essential for message reception and response, requires interaction with diverse individuals. Engaging with individuals from different cultural backgrounds needs a fundamental comprehension of their respective cultures. The intricate and dynamic nexus between culture and communication underscores communication's pivotal role as a cultural linchpin, driving cultural evolution (Mundeza, 2021). Upon relocation, individuals must acclimate to novel environments and cultural contexts. Typically, immigrants possess limited familiarity with the host culture, paralleled by indigenous residents' reciprocal lack of insight into immigrant cultures. Inter-cultural communication challenges ensue from these disparities, exacerbated by individual cultural idiosyncrasies, impeding effective communication (Sari & Rahardjo, 2013).

Cultural and environmental differences sometimes become challenges and even obstacles for students studying abroad to adapt. Students often face various challenges including assessments and how to communicate with lecturers and peers (Hussain & Shen, 2019). For students grappling with a foreign language, linguistic dissimilarities compound these challenges, with each student adopting distinct coping mechanisms for linguistic and cultural disparities.

Adaptation, the process of assimilating to novel circumstances, represents a formidable endeavor for students. Social adaptation, a pivotal component thereof, facilitates integration into the local community. Cultural adaptation, more broadly, entails acclimatizing to unfamiliar cultural paradigms, preserving one's original cultural identity while engaging with diverse cultures (Fakhriana, 2018). Cultural adaptation is a natural reaction to a new culture and environment. Students must be aware of social integration and comprehend the sociocultural character of multicultural societies in different nations. Cultural adaptation is also a way to maintain a balance between maintaining original cultural

identity and interacting with other cultures. International students, confronted with the daunting task of comprehending host cultures and languages, often encounter impediments to cultural assimilation (Hussain & Shen, 2019).

Daily interactions within local communities foster nuanced understanding of cultural variances and shared values, contingent upon individuals' adaptability. Adaptation challenges are contingent upon contextual factors and intersect with individual traits such as personality, motivation, and background (Gong et al., 2021). Additionally, environmental factors play a crucial role in the adaptation process, contributing to individualized adaptation strategies.

In addition to adaptation challenges, students commonly grapple with culture shock, precipitated by dissonance between familiar and unfamiliar cultural norms, encompassing cleanliness, time management, and social etiquette (Febiyana & Turistiati, 2019). The transition from familiar to unfamiliar cultural milieus engenders culture shock, manifesting as reactions to new environments, social dynamics, and unfamiliar customs (Shieh, 2014).

China's renowned education system, ranked among the world's finest, attracts students globally, including a substantial contingent from Indonesia. Notably, China hosts numerous universities ranked within the global top 100, solidifying its allure as a destination for higher education. According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, in 2019, the country welcomed 15,050 Indonesian students for academic pursuits.

Studying abroad presents distinctive challenges, particularly attributable to linguistic, cultural, and environmental disparities, which may impede academic endeavours. Indonesian students, in particular, confront unique challenges within China's educational landscape and academic milieu, necessitating heightened academic diligence relative to their domestic counterparts. While generalizations are inherently limited, prevalent issues among foreign students, notably Indonesians, encompass communication barriers, adjustment difficulties, and intercultural conflicts, necessitating adept resolution to mitigate impacts on social and academic spheres.

In Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory, the correlation between face management, cultural orientation, and conflict resolution styles is elucidated. This theoretical framework delineates how individuals navigate conflicts within cultural contexts. Within this framework, five distinct responses to conflicting situations emerge: avoidance, accommodation, compromise, domination, and integration (Sukmono & Junaedi, 2021). These responses serve as strategic tools for individuals to manage both face concerns and conflict resolution, as individuals strive to uphold their self-images and garner respect and appreciation from others.

Numerous studies have delved into the adaptation processes of migrating students, whether domestically or internationally. For instance, research by Min Hou on Chinese students in Australia underscores the significance of face and identity in elucidating the multifaceted dynamics of intercultural conflict management. By exploring the interplay of face and identity, researchers can discern the underlying motives and rationales guiding individuals' selection of facework strategies in conflict resolution (Hou, 2023). Similarly, investigations into Indonesian students in the United States highlight how their overseas experiences equip them with knowledge, motivation, and competencies to confront and surmount challenges (Ali et al., 2022).

The present study focuses on the challenges encountered by Indonesian students studying in China and their strategies for managing intercultural conflicts. Utilizing the lens of Face-Negotiation Theory, this research endeavors to examine how Indonesian students perceive and address conflicts within the Chinese academic setting. Ultimately, this study aims to elucidate the strategies employed by Indonesian students to navigate and mitigate conflicts during their tenure in China..

2. Method

The research methodology employed in this study is descriptive qualitative research, utilizing a case study approach. Qualitative research serves to explore various aspects of human existence, including lives, behaviors, cultures, and societal dynamics (Murdiyanto, 2020). Emphasizing a nuanced comprehension of social issues grounded in reality, this methodology delves into the intricacies of social phenomena. Specifically, the case study method, as delineated by Robert K. Yin,

offers a means to delve deeply into complex social phenomena, providing comprehensive explanations (Yin, 2018).

In this research, Indonesian students studying in China serve as key informants, offering firsthand insights into the phenomena under investigation. Participant selection adheres to purposive sampling, ensuring relevance to the research objectives. Data collection involves interviews with three Indonesian students who have been studying in Chinese universities for over a year at the commencement of data collection. The interview methodology encompasses a combination of narrative and semi-structured interviews, conducted individually with each participant.

Following data collection, the subsequent phase involves data analysis. The study employs Miles and Huberman's data analysis techniques, a methodical approach aimed at elucidating the interactive dynamics observed during informant interviews. This iterative process continues until data saturation is achieved, ensuring comprehensive coverage of pertinent themes and insights (Sugiyono, 2013). Miles and Huberman's analysis framework comprises three key processes: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, facilitating a systematic and rigorous analysis of the collected data.

3. Result and Discussion

While living and studying in China, Indonesian students, like many international s, grapple with intercultural challenges. The three informants, denoted as P, F, and N, have resided in China for over a year, encountering a shared array of issues and obstacles. Culture shock manifests prominently in their experiences, illustrated by encounters with novel conveniences such as Alipay and WeChat for payments, pristine environments devoid of litter, and climatic disparities between seasons. Moreover, the divergent educational paradigm in China, distinct from that of Indonesia, exerts considerable pressure on them. They observe that Chinese students exhibit remarkable diligence and discipline, fostering an intensely competitive academic atmosphere. Additionally, interpersonal misunderstandings with peers, lecturers, or supervisors compound their challenges, contributing to a demanding academic journey. Consequently, this section delves into the nuances of these misunderstandings and elucidates the conflict management strategies deployed by the informants..

3.1. Misunderstandings

The informants frequently encounter misunderstandings primarily attributable to language disparities, posing significant obstacles to effective communication, notably with their professors. Beyond the linguistic variance between Indonesia and China, regional accents prevalent in certain Chinese locales further compound these challenges. Additionally, international students occasionally face differential treatment, with some local students displaying reticence in interacting with them, stemming from fear, limited English proficiency, or other motivations.

N recounts multiple instances of misunderstanding with her supervisor, both during class sessions and in remote communications. Communication difficulties arise partly due to her supervisor's limited proficiency in English, exacerbating misinterpretations and leading to strained interactions. In one instance, N misinterpreted her Chinese language teacher's instructions, resulting in erroneous completion of a task, attributed to her ongoing language learning process.

Meanwhile, P, enrolled in a Chinese-taught class alongside local students, encounters distinct treatment disparities. During a group assignment with an online component, P and her Russian peer find themselves excluded, precipitating conflict with local classmates. Despite voicing grievances, P realizes the absence of culpability and ultimately secures inclusion in a group through the intervention of the class president.

Similarly, F, residing in Chongqing, contends with comprehension challenges due to local accents. Despite proficiency in Chinese, F grapples with understanding conversations among locals conversing in the distinctive Chongqing accent, highlighting the impact of regional linguistic variations on intercultural communication.

In sum, language differences pose pervasive challenges for international students in navigating academic and social contexts in China, with misunderstandings arising from linguistic disparities and

differential treatment compounded by regional accents, necessitating adept strategies for effective communication and conflict resolution.

Language indeed holds paramount importance in daily life, serving as a fundamental tool for learning activities and social interactions. The linguistic divergence between Indonesia and China compounds the challenges for Indonesian students, particularly given the intricacies of the Chinese language, renowned for its vast array of characters and tonal intricacies. Consequently, Indonesian students in the process of mastering Chinese often experience misunderstandings with native speakers, and vice versa.

In addition to linguistic barriers, informant F grapples with further layers of misunderstanding stemming from her identity as a Muslim woman wearing the hijab. F's adept use of Chinese often leads others to erroneously assume her to be a native Chinese speaker. Despite her non-native status and unfamiliarity with the local accent, some locals mistakenly perceive her as a native Chinese individual of Islamic heritage. Consequently, F is occasionally addressed in the Chongqing dialect, reflecting assumptions of her local origin and further complicating interactions.

These challenges underscore the multifaceted nature of intercultural communication, where language proficiency and cultural perceptions intersect to shape individuals' experiences and interactions. As such, adept navigation of linguistic and cultural differences is essential for fostering mutual understanding and effective communication in diverse social contexts.

3.2. Conflict management

In this section, the researcher examines the conflict management strategies employed by Indonesian students studying in China when confronted with conflicts or challenges, framed within the framework of face-negotiation theory. This theory endeavors to forecast how individuals navigate facework, drawing upon cultural, personality, and situational factors (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). Within this framework, "face" denotes how individuals wish to be perceived and treated, encompassing their social self-concept and relational dynamics (Ting-Toomey, 2017). Facework, in turn, refers to behaviors aimed at preserving one's own and others' face, encompassing values such as respect, loyalty, and status (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Drawing from the empirical findings, informant N adopts an avoidance strategy in conflict management. Avoidance entails circumventing conflict and the associated situation, ranging from ignoring or denying the issue to physically withdrawing from the confrontation (Ting-Toomey, 2017). While avoidance may forestall immediate conflict, it often precludes problem resolution, failing to address the needs of both parties (Yu & Chen, 2008). N's decision to overlook a language misunderstanding with her lecturer exemplifies this strategy, opting not to confront the issue to avert potential discord with the lecturer in the future.

Similarly, informant F, frequently misidentified as a local Chinese, employs avoidance as a conflict management strategy. When faced with conversations in the Chongqing accent, F asserts her foreigner identity to deflect conflict and preserve harmony. This aligns with Ting-Toomey's assertion that individuals from collectivistic cultures often favor avoidance as a conflict style (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Conversely, informant P adopts a compromising strategy in conflict resolution. Compromising is a strategy carried out by approaching both opposing parties to obtain a middle ground (Sukmono & Junaedi, 2021). Compromise involves reconciling opposing viewpoints to reach a mutually acceptable solution, albeit at the expense of fully satisfying each party's needs (Yu & Chen, 2008). P's experience, wherein she and her friend accept an offer from the class president to join their group, illustrates this approach. In employing compromise, individuals often leverage fairness appeals and propose trade-offs to expediently resolve conflicts (Ting-Toomey, 2017).

In essence, Indonesian students navigating conflicts in the Chinese academic landscape deploy varied conflict management strategies, reflecting their cultural orientations and situational considerations. These strategies, whether avoidance, compromise, or others, play pivotal roles in preserving interpersonal relationships and navigating complex social dynamics in a multicultural environment.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the researcher concludes that Indonesian students studying in China employ distinct conflict management strategies. N and F opt for the avoidance strategy to sidestep further misunderstandings, whereas P selects the compromising strategy to achieve a mutually agreeable resolution. The choice of conflict management strategies is contingent upon the specific circumstances and issues encountered by each individual. Negotiating between their own cultural framework and that of others enables individuals to effectively address problems and enhance intercultural relations. The evolution of intercultural competencies offers valuable insights into navigating intercultural conflicts.

However, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in this research. Firstly, the analysis of conflict management among Indonesian students in China is solely conducted through the lens of face-negotiation theory. Secondly, due to time constraints, the study only includes three participants as samples. Hence, further comprehensive research employing diverse theories or concepts is warranted to garner additional perspectives and enrich the study.

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6. References

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