

Intercultural Communication Apprehension as a Mediator between Generational Differences and Conflict

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Successful communication skills support work and academic activities. However, people with different cultural backgrounds can struggle to communicate with each other, causing conflict and reduced productivity. This study investigated the mediating role of intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) on the relationship between generational differences and conflict in multicultural offices and aimed to explore the causes of conflicts in such offices as well as its effect on work performance and mood. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach with a quasi-mixed design. A sample of 130 employees from the embassies to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Jakarta, Indonesia, participated in the research. The quantitative analysis revealed that ICA is a strong mediating variable between generational differences and conflict, demonstrating how generational differences can lead to conflict when mediated by ICA. The main effect of ICA was significant ($t = -.84, p = .40, 95\% \text{ CI } [-2.77, 1.12]$, bootstrap 5000). Qualitative data indicated that the conflicts caused by cultural differences in multicultural environments resulted from differences in work performance, expectations, and attitudes. Conflicts affected work performance and mood, resulting in a further reduction of productivity. This study contributes to improving communication in multicultural offices by demonstrating the benefits of lower ICA levels and recommending ways to reduce conflict between colleagues with different generations and cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: communication anxiety, age, conflict, expatriates, multicultural office

Communication skills are essential to support the success of work and academic activities. The ability to convey and express ideas in an appropriate way is necessary to reduce confusion during social interaction; however, some individuals may experience communication difficulties, especially with people from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, academic and work activities in a multicultural environment can be promoted by examining one obstacle to successful communication, namely intercultural communication apprehension (ICA). Different levels of anxiety and fear affect individuals' psychological motivation to initiate or maintain communication, specifically intercultural communication. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) defined ICA as the anxiety or fear related to real or

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anticipated interaction with people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Individuals with high levels of ICA tend to avoid interaction with those from different groups.

Different cultural backgrounds can lead to differences in communication styles, and culture affects the way people interact, as it shapes how they interpret messages and comprehend their surroundings (Samovar et al., 2001). Several studies on the ICA factor (Neuliep & Ryan, 1998; Martin et al., 2002) have suggested that the high level of ICA observed in international students was due to their varied cultural backgrounds. This condition also applies to employees from different cultural backgrounds and their work activities in multicultural offices; to successfully complete their tasks, employees working in multicultural environments need to cross cultural boundaries during their daily interactions (Dowling & Welch, 2004) and lower their levels of ICA.

Beyond its function to enhance effective task and work performance, low ICA is necessary to establish positive relationships among colleagues. Heggins and Jackson (2003) reported that informal social networks were essential for Asian students in the US who were uncomfortable contacting university support services when problems arose. In 1997, an ethnographic study conducted in a Japanese factory reported that 75% of communication occurrences within the organization were informal (Kilduff et al., 1997). O'Reilly et al. (1998) noted that, in social interaction, conflict undoubtedly arises due to diversity, as it produces different expectations, attitudes, beliefs, norms, and ways of performing tasks and work. Maintaining positive relationships with colleagues helps reduce future conflict that may emerge in a multicultural environment, as successful conflict resolution is greatly influenced by the quality of existing relationships among team members (Glaser, 2010).

Previous research has reported that individuals with high ICA levels were less involved in conversations with their community, which consequently affected their communication skills (Nelson & Webster, 1991). Additionally, high ICA levels in students have been suggested as a cause of low grade point averages and lower scores on college entrance exams. High ICA may affect students' self-esteem and is likely to lead to lower competency, attractiveness, and motivation in career advancement (Adler, 1980; McCroskey & Andersen, 1976). ICA has also been shown to explain the daily and academic life content of international students in Turkey at the rate of 14.8% (Seyitoglu et al., 2015). Moreover, Li and Kaye (1998) reported that international students from Asia and other developing countries experienced major difficulties that were notably different from those experienced by students from Western Europe, particularly in terms of making friends and feeling homesick.

The lack of theoretical development of this concept is mainly due to the limited number of cultural studies incorporating geographical factors (Yoshitake, 2002). Kim (2002) argued that further research on understudied groups in intercultural environments would be beneficial as most studies have been conducted in Europe, North America, and East Asia. Moreover, most studies on intercultural communication have focused on students as participants, neglecting other multicultural spaces such as workplaces (Rahmani & Croucher, 2017). Furthermore, although lower levels of ICA are expected to reduce or even prevent conflict, the question of whether or not ICA levels affect the emergence of potential conflict in multicultural environments needs to be addressed. Age has been suggested as a factor affecting ICA levels (Watson et al., 1989); however, information concerning different ICA levels across generational groups has not yet been closely examined.

To address the gaps in current ICA research with respect to case selection and subjects as well as explanatory factors, we consider ICA to be a variable that may exist between generations and one that may influence the emergence of conflict in the multicultural office setting in Southeast Asia. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which headquartered in Jakarta, Indonesia, is among the largest international organizations in Southeast Asia. The ASEAN continues to experience rapid development. Therefore, this study offers insight to strengthen communication in multicultural workplace settings among the citizens of ASEAN countries. This study investigated the mediating role of ICA on the relationship between generational differences and conflict presence in multicultural environments.

The Relationship between Generational Differences, Conflict, and ICA

Generational Differences

According to the generational theory (Howe & Strauss, 2000), a generation is a group of individuals sharing birth years that span a period of approximately 20 years as well as the area where they grew up and important life events during their development (Zemke et al., 2013). Intergenerational differences are unavoidable. They may take root as philosophies, values, or communication styles (Strauss & Howe, 2006). The millennial generation, or Gen Y (born between 1982–2001), is more diverse, globally oriented, and knowledgeable compared to the previous generation, referred to as Gen X (born between 1961–1981), in terms of recent technology, multitasking, and communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The establishment of communication and collaboration in work environment can be improved by practicing generational awareness between team members (Lyons et al., 2019).

The inability of an organization's management to address generational work-value differences may result in increased turnover, reduced organizational morale, and lower profits (Carver & Candela, 2008). Sessa et al. (2007) argued that organizations will not be globally competitive if they do not take advantage of the strengths that generational diversity can offer to the workplace, such as the sharing of different points of view to promote innovation and creativity. Conversely, ignoring the differences produced by generation diversity may establish a conflicted and segregated workplace (Weingarten, 2009).

Conflict

Conflict refers to perceived or real incompatibility of expectations, values, processes, goals, or outcomes between two or more interdependent individuals or groups (Cupach & Canary, 1997; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Stephan and Stephan (1996) noted that many American college students reported feeling frustrated, uncomfortable, and impatient when encountering communication difficulties with international students on their campuses. Cultural variations in norms, values, and customs, cultural differences in non-verbal communication styles, and accented speech contributed to intercultural communication problems and misunderstandings. The way individuals handle conflict is mainly influenced by their experiences and cultural backgrounds (Martin & Nakayama, 2010), as culture forms individuals' mindsets and influences how they act and perceive others' actions (Ross, 1993).

While conflict is influenced by a lack of intergroup interaction (Lake & Rothchild, 1996), frequent, quality intergroup interactions may increase intergroup awareness and offer

groups beneficial information about in-group members. In contrast, high levels of anxiety or apprehension cause intergroup interaction avoidance, making conflict inevitable. According to the communication accommodation theory (CAT), the use of verbal and nonverbal language is accommodated to reach a preferred level of social distance between oneself and others (Cargile & Giles, 1996). The fundamental strategies are *convergence* and *divergence*. In the intercultural context, the CAT emphasizes that intercultural communication not only comprises referential information exchanges but, most importantly, social connectedness and the negotiation of social identities as well (Giles & Noels, 1997). Therefore, to reduce conflict by increasing intergroup interaction in intercultural context, levels of apprehension in intercultural communication should be reduced (Glaser, 2010).

Intercultural Communication Apprehension

The more an individual is uncertain during intercultural communication, the higher their related anxiety (Neuliep, 2012), resulting in increased intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) levels and reduced willingness to participate in such communication (Lin & Rancer, 2003). This can cause decreased respect and tolerance toward culturally different individuals. However, an individual's willingness to interact with another culture can be increased if ICA levels are decrease (Lin & Rancer, 2003; Neuliep, 2012). Furthermore, the level of ICA is negatively correlated with the frequency of traveling outside one's hometown, the size of one's hometown, and the number of individuals of the same race in one's hometown (Wrench et al., 2006). This finding is supported by an earlier study that reported that organized mass tourism in Southeast Asia did not promote intercultural communication and relationships (Hassan, 1975).

Additionally, Pritchard and Skinner (2002) reported significant difficulties facing international students in the UK in forming meaningful social relationships. A study of Korean students at a US university found a significant positive association between ICA and difficulty in cognitive and behavioral adaptation. These findings suggest that ICA affects cultural adaptation. High ICA individuals are less likely to approach intercultural strangers, thereby inhibiting their reduction and management of anxiety and uncertainty, findings that mirror in the anxiety uncertainty management (AUM) theory (Hsu & Chen, 2020). Initially designed to support intercultural training, the AUM theory aims at increasing the quality of communication in new cultures. Gudykunst (2005) argued that the AUM can have a practical application in intercultural interaction focusing on anxiety surrounding communication activities, with the basic assumption that some level of anxiety and uncertainty is desired for effective communication, especially, communication in multicultural offices with mixed generations workforce.

The Mediating Role of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (ICA)

In this study, ICA was proposed to mediate the relationship between generational differences and conflict. In the context of this research, generation is defined specifically as an integrative explanation of generational age groups (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

While past research has reported that age may be associated with ICA levels (Watson et al., 1989), there is virtually no research investigating the association of generational groups with ICA. However, research in related literature has consistently reported that age had marginal effects on ICA among international students in the USA (Lee & Rice, 2007). A

study of Nordic expatriates and Japanese employees conducted to ascertain if age had a direct influence on the extent to which and with whom Japanese employees were motivated to communicate revealed similar findings (Peltorkopi, 2006). Japanese employees appeared to communicate only with other Japanese employees in the same age range. They demonstrated different behaviors when communicating with older colleagues, even those of the same nationality. Additionally, Japanese employees were prone to being dishonest when expressing their opinions to older and foreign colleagues. Moreover, in another study, López-Cabarcos et al. (2017) suggested that employees' relationships are perceived differently by different generations of employees. That study showed that the younger the employees are, the more they tend to positively evaluate the relationships among employees in general. A study of the age categories of employees has also demonstrated that age diversity plays a role in workplace behavior toward colleagues (López-Cabarcos et al., 2017).

Furthermore, lower ICA levels have been shown to affect successful conflict resolution in multicultural environments (Glaser, 2010). Previous studies reported that poor interaction and other organizational problems can cause conflict among employees from different generations (Arsenault, 2004), which indicates that generation can indirectly affect conflict by way of altering ICA. Moreover, work-value conflict can occur due to miscommunication, differences in the use of technology, work-life balance problems, and other issues between different generations (Carver & Candela, 2008). Based on research suggesting that ICA is conceptually associated with age and conflict, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: ICA mediates the relationship between generational differences and conflict.

Research of generational characteristics in the workplace is considered essential as it brings about new perspectives on workplace relationships (Torsello, 2019). Because of different expectations and collective behavioural characteristics between generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000), the workplace can be valued in different ways by different generations, which can have distinct effects on career prospects and preferences concerning management models and leadership styles (Green & Roberts, 2012). In a generationally mixed workforce, ignoring those differences may create a divided and conflicted workplace (Weingarten, 2009).

To explore a possible connection between the cumulative effects of ICA and the conflict experiences of employees in multicultural offices with qualitative approach, two theoretical propositions were adopted:

- TP 1: Conflicts in multicultural offices are caused by cultural differences;
- TP 2: Conflict affects work performance and mood.

In this study, we focused on embassies to ASEAN as multicultural office settings among the citizens of ASEAN countries.

Context of the Embassies to ASEAN (Permanent Mission Offices)

The ASEAN is a regional organization that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation among its members (Albert & Maizland, 2019). The ASEAN was established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Lao, Myanmar, and Cambodia later joined, constituting the ten current members of ASEAN.

The urgency of human resource development in the ASEAN region led each member of ASEAN as well as ten other countries to establish mission offices to strengthen their cooperation with ASEAN; these mission offices function as embassies to ASEAN, separate from bilateral embassies. These embassies to ASEAN comprise 20 embassies exclusively delegated to the ASEAN organization and consist of ten permanent representatives' offices for the ten ASEAN countries as well as ten dialogue partner offices. ASEAN's dialogue partners are Japan, Australia, the European Union, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, Korea, India, China, and Russia.

Methods

Research Design

This study used a quasi-mixed design approach, which differs from a mixed-methods approach (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). A true mixed-methods approach exists only if there is an *integration* of approaches and findings, that is, a “draw[ing of] inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Quasi-mixed designs collect both quantitative and qualitative data with little or no integration of the two types in a study's finding or inferences. Here, quantitative data constituted the focus of the study, while qualitative data was not integrated when assessing the research question. This design can yield anecdotal evidence, but such information is peripheral to the analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Since surveys should be conducted first to allow generalization of the results, with research then continuing with detailed qualitative data collection to gather specific views from participants (Creswell et al., 2003), we first collected and analyzed quantitative data and then used qualitative data to add further insight to the discussion and interpretation phases.

Participants

According to the Diplomatic List 2016 issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the Updated Diplomatic List of each embassy, the total number of foreign and local employees of embassies to the ASEAN countries in Jakarta, Indonesia as of 2017 was 175 people. A sample of 130 employees were selected as participants through stratified random sampling to represent not only the overall population but also key population subgroups, especially smaller minority groups. The samples included people who worked in the ASEAN embassies, as these employees were likely to have direct interaction with others from different cultural backgrounds, especially those from other ASEAN countries.

Data Collection

Data was collected from April to June 2018. Trial and pilot studies were conducted before the actual data collection. Three experts in applied behavioral science in Thailand reviewed the questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions using the item-objective congruence index. The questionnaire and interview were then trialed to ensure the participants' understanding of the questions and evaluate the design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was piloted with 30 participants, employees of bilateral embassies in Jakarta, to measure the questions' reliability. English was used throughout all data collection processes.

The primary ethical issues in this study centered on informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and the right skip some questions or to withdraw. The questionnaire was only distributed to participants who had agreed to, signed, and returned a written consent form. The consent form stated that the researchers would protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions and that participants' confidentiality would remain secure. Researchers provided participants with internet-connected devices to complete the questionnaire and assisted them through the process.

After the quantitative data collection, eight participants who had the lowest and highest scores from each category (i.e., intercultural communication apprehension and conflict) were selected for semi-structured interviews. Interviews began with an introduction to the researchers' background and the research objectives. Researchers requested participants' permission to record the conversation, which ranged in length from 10 to 25 minutes. Interviews ended when the information that could be collected from the interviewee had reached saturation point and became repetitive and no new themes were generated (Reid, 1996; Sale et al., 2002).

Measures

For this study, the following classifications for generation-based age groups were used: Gen Y, born between 1982–2001; and Gen X, born between 1961–1981 (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Age was categorized into five smaller groups (1 = 17-26 years old; 2 = 27-36 years old; 3 = 37-46 years old; 4 = 47-56 years old; 5 = over 57 years old), then transformed into dummy variables of 0 and 1 based on the classification.

The personal report of intercultural communication apprehension (PRICA) was used to measure ICA, assessing people's anxiety when interacting with others from different cultural groups (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). This instrument consists of 14 questions, each rated by a five-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 5 = "strongly agree"). ICA scores range from 14 to 72; a score above 52 indicates a high ICA level, whereas a score below 32 denotes a low ICA level. Moderate scores fall between 32 and 52. Previous research has reported PRICA as stable and consistent, with estimated alpha reliability above .90 when it was completed by a native English speaker. Nevertheless, it may have a lower reliability estimation if translated into other languages.

The presence of conflict (POC) scale was used to measure conflict caused by cultural differences. Researchers developed this instrument based on a conflict experience concept in Martin and Nakayama (2010). This portion of the questionnaire consisted of eight questions related to participants' experience in facing conflicts, focusing on the frequency of participants' conflict encounters and their causes. Participants answered the items on a five-point Likert scale consisting of "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," and "always." Moderate scores ranged between 13 and 25. A pilot study ($N = 30$) produced an alpha reliability of .88.

Data Analysis

The PROCESS Macro software package was used to test ICA as a mediating variable between generational differences and POC. To assist in explaining and interpreting the quantitative data, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Demographic data

There were 130 participants in this study, with a ratio of 52.3% ($n = 68$) males to 47.7% ($n = 62$) females. The participants were divided into two generational age groups: Gen Y and Gen X. Gen Y included participants aged 17 to 36 ($n = 72$, 55.4%), and Gen X covered participants aged 37 to 57 ($n = 58$, 44.6%). The participants were mostly Indonesian ($n = 44$, 33.8%), followed by American ($n = 10$, 7.7%), Japanese ($n = 9$, 6.9%), Chinese ($n = 8$, 6.2%), Malaysian ($n = 7$, 5.4%), and Filipino/a ($n = 6$, 4.6%). Cambodian, Myanmar, Singaporean, and Thai individuals constituted 3.8% ($n = 5$). Participants from Australia, Korea, India, Canada, Lao, Brunei, the European Union, New Zealand, and Russia together made up less than 21% ($n = 26$). The most common amount of work experience of participants was 3 to 5 years ($n = 35$, 26.9%), followed by 6 to 8 years ($n = 34$, 26.2%), 9 to 11 years ($n = 24$, 18.5%), 1 to 2 years ($n = 19$, 14.6%), and over 11 years ($n = 18$, 13.8%). Participants mostly held bachelor's degrees ($n = 76$, 58.5%), with master's degrees ($n = 50$, 38.5%) and PhDs ($n = 4$, 3.1%) making up the remainder.

Table 1 displays the correlation matrix, mean, and standard deviation between variables. A two-tailed Pearson correlation test with 95% CI and bootstrap set at 5000 was conducted to measure linkages between the variables. The result indicates significant differences among the variables ($p = .01$).

Table 1
Correlation Matrix of Variables (n= 130)

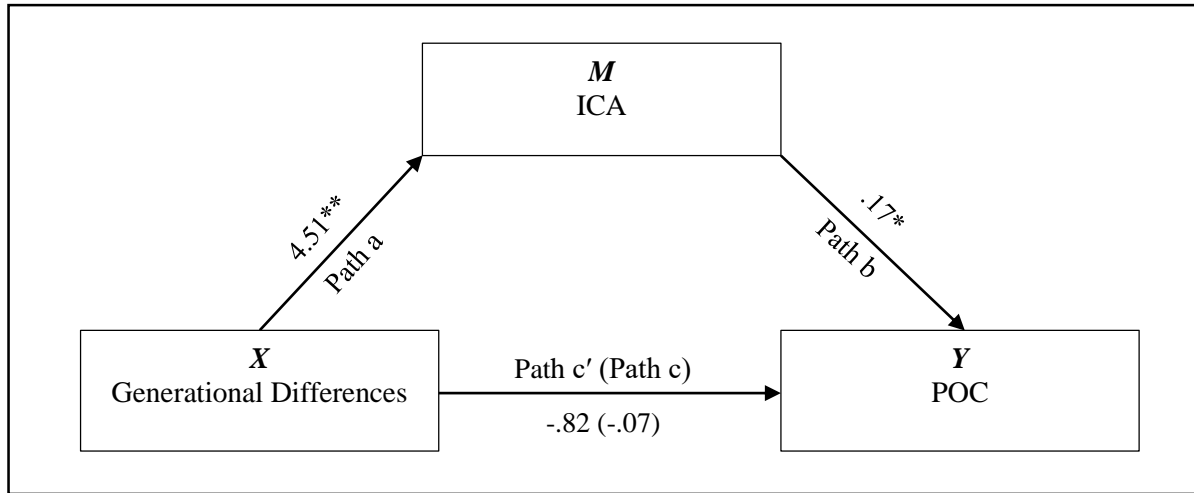
Variable	Generation (X)	ICA (M)	POC (Y)
Generation (X)	1.00	-	-
ICA (M)	.28**	1.00	-
POC (Y)	-.01	.23**	1.00
Mean	.45	36.33	13.45
Std. Deviation	.50	8.11	5.46

Note. X = independent variable; M = mediator; Y = dependent variable. ** $p < .01$

Mediation Analysis

Figure 1 shows the analytical framework of this study. The model used was adapted from model 4 of the conditional process analysis by Hayes and Scharkow (2013). Intercultural communication apprehension was a mediating variable between generation and POC. The model had three paths: (a) path a , the relationship between generation and ICA; (b) path b , the relationship between ICA and POC; and (c) path c' , the relationship between generation and POC (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The unstandardized indirect effect of .75, 95% CI [.13, 1.59] was computed with 5000 bootstrapped samples, and produced a coefficient of -.07 total effect (path c).

Figure 1
Analytical Framework of Research



Note. The analytical framework shows association between generation, intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) and presence of conflict (POC). There was a significant indirect effect of generation on POC through ICA, $ab = .75$, CI [.13, 1.59]. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Following (Baron & Kenny, 1986), four steps of mediation analysis was employed next to test the mediating function of ICA. The output report of path c' , which is the direct effect of X on Y showed a negative effect of $-.82$ ($t = -.84$, $p = .40$, 95% CI [-2.77, 1.12]). The lower limit was a negative value, whereas the upper limit was a positive value; therefore, the coefficient was considered insignificant.

Table 2 shows the result of mediation analysis of this study. Path a of this hypothesis, that is, the relation between generation and ICA was significant at $p < .01$. Path b in this hypothesis, that is, the relation between ICA and POC was significant ($p < .05$) and indicated conflict was explained by ICA and generation ($p < .05$).

Table 2
Result of Mediation Analysis

Construct/Variable	Regression Coefficients				Mediation Role	Result
	Coeff.	<i>t</i> statistic	<i>p</i> value	95% CI		
Total effect: Gen → POC (c)	-.07	-.07	.94	[-1.99, 1.84]		
ICA as Mediator:						
Gen → ICA (a)	4.51	3.27	.0014	[1.78, 7.24]		
ICA → POC (b)	.17	2.76	.01	[.05, .29]		
Direct effect: Gen → POC (c')	-.82	-.84	.40	[-2.77, 1.12]		
Indirect effect: Gen → ICA → POC (ab)	.75			BootCI [.13, 1.59]	Full Mediation	H 1: Supported

Note. Coeff. = unstandardized regression coefficient; BootCI = bootstrap confidence intervals.

In contrast to the direct effect, the indirect effect showed a positive value. This indirect effect was performed with 95% CI and bootstrap set at 5000. The result of the indirect effect

of generation on POC was .75, 95% BootCI [.13, 1.59]. The lower and upper limits did not include zero; thus, the coefficient was significant. To validate the mediation analysis, when paths *a* and *b* are controlled, path *c* is no longer significant, with the strongest indicator of mediation occurring when path *c* is zero (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Qualitative Findings

Six phases of thematic analysis were employed: familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The qualitative results are presented as two themes to address the 2 research questions.

Perception of Working in a Multicultural Environment

This study found that participants with different ICA scores responded differently to intercultural communication and conflict in a multicultural environment. To support this result, participants with different levels of ICA were interviewed regarding their thoughts about ICA and their experience with conflict.

One interviewee suggested that the anxiety felt by participants may be related to their attitudes toward intercultural communication:

Mostly, I feel quite tense and nervous when interacting with foreigners, especially my supervisor. Sometimes, I feel inferior to them. I don't know how to approach them. (Participant 5, high ICA)

In contrast, the statements given by participants with low ICA were more positive:

So interesting and also so many opportunit[ies], challenging, and also so [much] knowledge that you will get from them. For example, maybe you can make a lot of friends from [other] countr[ies] from another background and also with different cultures, different backgrounds, and ethnicities. It can make you a little bit open [minded]. (Participant 3, low ICA)

Conflict Experience

As shown in the quantitative data, ICA had a positive effect on conflict. To gain further insight into conflicts in multicultural environments, participants were requested to share their experiences of encountering conflict. Conflict experience was divided into three sub-themes: (1) causes of conflict; (2) feeling during conflict; (3) effect of conflict; and (4) conflict with specific cultural background.

The causes of conflict were divided into five categories based on differences in: (1) modes of work performance; (2) expectations; (3) attitudes; (4) beliefs; and/or (5) norms. Issues related to work performance, attitudes, and expectations were found to be the main causes of conflict.

Differences in work performance. Participants agreed that inter-colleague and cultural differences in their work activities were reflected in the work pressure that they received or

gave to others; additionally, placing too much pressure on one's colleagues would certainly initiate conflict. Another work performance difference that could cause conflict was working pace, as noted by participants:

More like [the] pressure and push. Sometimes, they know it will not work. But sometimes they force us to push somebody else, like people from [the] government. (Participant 1, low POC)

Ah yes, you know how much pressure you are able to take and how much pressure you are giving to others. If you are giving pressure to others, the pressure will percolate to them, then you will definitely find...some kind of conflict. So, it is better not to percolate the pressure that you are getting to your subordinates. I think then you will not have conflict. (Participant 2, low ICA)

Maybe [a] little bit in working activity. Indonesians [are] a little bit relaxed, what you call "slow." It's different with Singaporeans, Singaporeans want to do [things] fast, make it fast. (Participant 3, low ICA)

Differences in expectations. The participant claimed that conflict generally takes place due to differences in expectations related to the government regulations of the host country. At times, diplomats expected that the host country's regulations would be applied similarly to those in their home countries.

Sometimes they don't understand what our rules [are] here. They are not locals...they want to apply their local rules here, but it cannot be done like that. (Participant 1, low POC)

Differences in attitude. The participant experienced conflict with other people from different cultural backgrounds because of their attitude, which was described as a display of superior behavior by the other party. Acts of superiority included undermining the participant and excluding them from informal occasions and meetings.

Sometimes, they assume that Indonesians are incompetent. They think they are smarter than us, superior to us, they really undermine us as a team, especially Indonesians. When they hang out, when they have meetings, they [don't] include Indonesians. In fact, we were excluded from the meeting just because we are Indonesian. (Participant 4, high POC)

Differences in beliefs. The participants stated that conflict occurred because of religious activities taking place during working hours. Diplomats frequently felt disrupted by religious activities.

So, most of my friends have conflicts about prayer times. The foreigner thought that praying five times a day is such a waste of time. (Participant 4, high POC)

Differences in norms. This conflict was caused by a lack of awareness of the social cues and norms of others. The participant did not realize that several terms could be offensive to other parties.

Last month, I went to Myanmar. I didn't know that the term "Burmese" for them is quite offensive if it is said by outsiders...Then I mentioned that "Hey, you are Burmese, blah blah," and then one of them got angry, "You should address us as Myanmarese, not Burmese." Yeah, I was confronted by them directly. (Participant 4, high POC)

Feelings during a conflict experience. The interviewer then continued to ask several questions concerning the feelings of participants when experiencing conflict. They responded that experiencing conflict could bring up uncomfortable feelings in the workplace.

I don't feel good to be honest. I feel like stepping back. (Participant 2, low ICA)

Work performance during conflict. Participants experienced negative emotions toward conflict that occurred in the workplace and claimed that it also reduced their productivity and work performance.

Yeah, maybe. Like it makes me [not] want to talk. (Participant 1, low POC)

Of course. You don't feel like [working], you feel disturbed mentally. So, I [try] to keep [the] conflict aside. Keep it away from yourself. That is better. (Participant 2, low ICA)

For three or four days, yeah, whenever I have to deal with a particular guy, and I have no [motivation to] work. He destroyed my work [motivation]. (Participant 4, high POC)

Conflict with people from a specific cultural background. Several participants claimed that they experienced conflicts only with people from several specific nationalities, such as Singaporean, Cambodian, French, and German. Participants emphasized that pronunciation, accent, problems with racism, and differing cultures were the main reasons.

Yes, somehow, I have a little bit [of] miscommunication with some people from ASEAN countries. Maybe like the pronunciation, different languages. Yes, like Singaporean English [or] Cambodian English, which is different from Indonesian English. (Participant 3, low ICA)

Like my latest story that I told you that the German [was] being racist. (Participant 4, high POC)

Discussion

Intercultural Communication Apprehension as a Mediator Variable

In this study, ICA was found to be a mediator between generational differences and conflict. Furthermore, all theoretical propositions were supported. The results of this study are theoretically consistent with the notion that ICA is positively associated with both generation and conflict. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found that different age generations possessed different ways of communicating, which may lead to different ICA

levels (Strauss & Howe, 1997). Differences across generations reflect capacities to learn and work via multitasking, technology, and communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

It was also noted that ICA affected POC. Several researchers in the last three decades have indicated that traveling and migration have made communication more *intercultural* and have shown that misunderstanding is developed in every encounter (Clyne, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Misunderstanding, which could lead to conflict, is an essential and unavoidable part of intercultural communication. Moreover, successful conflict resolution is highly influenced by the quality of relationships among team members (Guilherme et al., 2010). Teams with good internal relationships will likely try harder to solve conflicts. To achieve such a dynamic, repeated interactions are required, and low levels of ICA play an important role (Ostrom, 1990).

Quantitative data analysis found that ICA was found to be a perfect mediating variable between generation and POC. This finding supported previous studies reporting that tension and miscommunication often exist among employees of different ages (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014; Urick et al., 2017). These workplace conflicts occur when individuals judge others based on perceptions and expectations (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). The perception of a generation gap exists (Lester et al., 2012) and was found to cause intergenerational conflict in the workplace, ultimately leading to workplace tension (Urick et al., 2017).

The Distinction between Individuals with Low and Those with High Levels of ICA

The results of qualitative data analysis were added to support the quantitative data findings. Participants with low ICA levels and those with high ICA levels differ significantly regarding their experience interacting with foreigners or individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Participants with low ICA levels were found to have positive emotions, such as excitement, curiosity, and favorable perceptions, when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Conversely, participants with high ICA appeared to possess negative emotions in such situations, including fear, anxiety, and low confidence. This result supported the AUM theory, which states that when individuals experience a high level of anxiety and uncertainty, they will not be able to interpret others' behaviors or messages accurately (Gudykunst, 1995). In this case, individuals are expected to reduce their anxiety level to be able to interact efficiently with people from different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, individuals with high levels of ICA tend to censor themselves in the case of disagreement with others during communication (Hayes et al., 2005). High ICA individuals are more likely to accommodate or avoid conflict and disagreement, which make conflict resolution even harder to achieve.

Conflict Caused by Cultural Differences

With regard to experience with conflict, the participants mentioned several causes leading to the occurrence of conflict in a multicultural environment. Similar to previous studies, differences in performing tasks and work, expectations, attitudes, beliefs, and norms produced by diversity might lead to conflict in intercultural interaction (O'Reilly et al., 1998). The participants argued that conflicts caused by differences in performing work-related tasks were mainly related to working pressure and pace. Different cultural backgrounds shape how individuals think and act (Ross, 1993), which may explain why participants claimed that different countries had different working styles, including pressure and pace.

Another source of conflict was differences in expectations. It was found that conflict arose due to different expectations between participants and their colleagues concerning government regulations in the host country. In this case, diplomats from developed countries appeared to have high expectations for government regulations in the host country, which is a developing country; they expected better speed, service, and government performance.

Furthermore, attitude was also found to create conflict in multicultural environments. Participants had experienced their colleagues exhibiting acts of superiority and undermining them as equal colleagues, such as excluding them from formal and informal meetings. They believed this occurred because of their nationality as members of a developing country. This supports a previous study that reported that native English speakers generally appeared superior and more confident in expressing their thoughts (Zoels & Silbermayr, 2010).

Differences in beliefs were illustrated by a participant's experience that colleagues from other countries found that religious activities in the host country were sometimes seen as a disruption because some employees tended to use them as a reason to take longer breaks during working hours.

Differences in norms encompassed verbal and nonverbal actions that were considered impolite, inappropriate, or offensive. When individuals from different cultures communicate and the recipient does not share the same cultural variables and social values, cultural awareness is vital to accomplishing mutual understanding (Beamer, 1992).

Experience with Conflict

The participants indicated that they experienced negative feelings during conflict and stated that they felt as if they were "stepping back." In addition to producing these negative feelings, conflict was also found to affect work performance. This result was explained by several participants, who noted that conflicts can lead to low productivity. They claimed that they did not want to work or communicate with others when they were experiencing conflict in the office. They further indicated that conflict can ruin the workplace mood and create a feeling of mental disturbance. This reflects a prior study that found that work-value conflict also shapes the productiveness of organizational plans, concepts, and products (Sessa et al., 2007).

Several participants claimed that they frequently experienced conflict with people from specific cultural backgrounds, mentioning several nationalities including Singaporean, Cambodian, French, and German. The pronunciation or accent of people from ASEAN countries was cited as the main reason for conflict.

Limitations and Recommendations

There are four limitations to this study. First, the sample used was relatively small and not representative of all employees working in multicultural environments in ASEAN. Second, the study's participants worked in a specific industry and are frequently exposed to other cultures. A study with people working in other key ASEAN industries, such as electronics, textiles, and telecommunications, would provide invaluable practical implications. Third, the sample was culled from an organization the headquarters of which are located in Jakarta, Indonesia, one of ASEAN's permanent representatives. It is also important

to investigate ASEAN citizens working in multicultural organizations outside ASEAN territories for increased geographic representativeness. Finally, the present gap in the cultural studies of various groups also calls for a more diverse theoretical and methodological attitude to the understudied ICA groups, such as ethnic minorities, and understudied age groups, especially younger children and senior citizens. Special attention should be given to larger populations of participants in ASEAN countries, where this topic is understudied.

This study emphasizes the need for a better understanding of ICA, and how to reduce it to improve interaction in intercultural contexts to a degree of institutional accountability. Institutions must become more aware of ICA and conflict based on cultural differences, which exist in many forms, to avoid and resolve unwanted workplace conflicts. Educational and cultural plans may help support employees to reduce their ICA and enhance their intercultural communication skills. For example, one available ICA training is theory-based adjustment training, which is adapted from the AUM theory. Members of multicultural workplaces could be made aware of their responsibility in creating intellectual environments that embrace multi-nationals and intercultural sensitivity.

Conclusion

ICA was found to be a strong mediating variable between generational differences and conflict, with generation exerting an indirect effect on conflict when mediated by ICA.

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