Research Article
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Intercultural Communication in a Multicultural Rural Village: A Case Study from Desa Lilimori, Indonesia

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Abstract: Intercultural communication in multicultural societies is often assumed to foster mutual understanding and social integration through sustained interaction. However, empirical evidence suggests that coexistence does not always translate into deep intercultural engagement. This study examines intercultural communication practices in Desa Lilimori, a rural transmigration village in West Sulawesi characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) framework. The findings indicate that intercultural communication in Lilimori is primarily sustained through pragmatic adaptation rather than deep intercultural integration. Residents manage cultural differences through shared linguistic practices, communicative restraint, and situational negotiation that prioritize social stability and predictability. While tolerance and peaceful coexistence are evident, interaction remains bounded by ethnic homophily, managed social distance, and implicit cultural boundaries. Language choice, religious accommodation, and everyday social norms function as mechanisms for reducing uncertainty and minimizing communicative risk rather than fostering intercultural intimacy. This study contributes to intercultural communication scholarship by extending AUM theory into a rural, non-institutional context and by reconceptualizing multicultural harmony as an outcome of situational negotiation rather than integrative intercultural competence. The findings highlight the importance of examining everyday communication practices in understanding how social cohesion is maintained in long-term multicultural coexistence.

Introduction

Effective communication across cultural boundaries remains a critical challenge in increasingly pluralistic societies (1). In multicultural contexts, where individuals from diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds interact, the potential for miscommunication and social tension is significantly heightened (2). This condition is particularly salient in Indonesia, a country characterized by extensive cultural diversity with more than 1,300 ethnic groups. Despite its celebrated plurality, Indonesia has experienced recurrent interethnic and interreligious conflicts, including the communal violence in Ambon (1999-2002), which resulted in over 1,100 deaths and the displacement of more than 130,000 people (3). Such events demonstrate that cultural diversity alone does not guarantee social cohesion and underscore the need to examine how intercultural communication operates in everyday social life.

Although the Indonesian government promotes national unity through the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), practical challenges in cultivating mutual understanding among diverse communities persist (4). These challenges are often rooted in cultural misunderstandings, linguistic barriers, and entrenched social prejudices (5). Even where a shared national identity exists, social distance and communicative fragmentation may continue, particularly in rural or formerly transmigrated areas where heterogeneous populations are brought together through state policy rather than through organic social integration (6). In such contexts, everyday communication becomes a key mechanism through which cultural difference is negotiated, managed, or avoided.

One such context is Desa Lilimori in West Sulawesi, a rural transmigration village with a population of 2,788 residents representing multiple religious affiliations Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, and Hinduism and diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Bugis, Makassar, Lombok, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), Balinese, and Javanese communities (7). Although Lilimori is often described as a site of peaceful coexistence, preliminary observations and local accounts suggest that intercultural interaction within the village is uneven. Periodic misunderstandings, selective patterns of

social engagement, and latent tensions continue to emerge, shaped by differences in customs, language use, and cultural perceptions (8, 9). These dynamics indicate that harmony in multicultural settings may be sustained less through deep intercultural integration than through pragmatic adjustment and situational accommodation.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on intercultural communication, much of the existing literature focuses on urban, institutional, or formal settings. Such studies frequently emphasize normative ideals such as tolerance, harmony, and local wisdom, often assuming that prolonged coexistence naturally leads to intercultural competence. Far less attention has been paid to the micro-level communicative practices through which intercultural relationships are negotiated, constrained, or selectively maintained in everyday life within rural multicultural communities. This gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian context, where transmigration villages function as long-term sites of cultural encounter yet remain underexplored analytically.

Previous studies have examined intercultural adaptation, communal tolerance, and the role of local wisdom in fostering coexistence (10, 11). However, empirical research that critically investigates how intercultural communication is enacted at the grassroots level specifically how individuals manage cultural difference, uncertainty, and social boundaries in daily interaction remains limited. To address this gap, the present study employs Gudykunst's intercultural communication framework, particularly the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) perspective, to analyze patterns, enabling factors, and barriers of intercultural communication in Desa Lilimori. This theoretical lens enables the study to move beyond descriptive portrayals of multicultural harmony and to examine how intercultural competence is situationally constructed through repeated interaction and communicative restraint.

The novelty of this research lies in its grounded examination of intercultural communication within a rural transmigration village as a microcosm of Indonesia's cultural complexity. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study seeks to explore how residents from diverse cultural backgrounds communicate, adapt, and negotiate meaning in everyday social encounters, as well as the limits of such adaptation. By linking empirical findings with intercultural communication theory, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of intercultural communication in non-institutional, rural multicultural settings and offers insights into how social cohesion is maintained amid persistent cultural boundaries.

This study argues that harmony in rural multicultural communities should not be uncritically interpreted as evidence of effective intercultural communication. Instead, it should be understood as an outcome of situational negotiation, communicative restraint, and the ongoing management of social boundaries shaped by cultural familiarity and perceived difference.

Methodology

Study Design and Rationale

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore intercultural communication processes within a multicultural rural community. The qualitative approach was selected to capture the depth and complexity of lived experiences, cultural perceptions, and communication practices that cannot be sufficiently understood through quantitative methods. A descriptive design was particularly suited to elucidate real-world intercultural interactions, uncover patterns of behavior, and document the influence of cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity on interpersonal communication within the community of Desa Lilimori, Sulawesi Barat, Indonesia.

Study Site and Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select information-rich participants who possessed long-term experience and active involvement in intercultural interaction within the village. Rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, participant selection was guided by the principle of analytical relevance, which is a common standard in qualitative case study research.

Four key informants were selected based on three criteria: (1) extended length of residence in Desa Lilimori (15–25 years); (2) active participation in social, administrative, or economic activities involving interethnic interaction; and (3) direct experience in navigating cultural and religious diversity in everyday communication. These criteria ensured that each informant was able to provide in-depth and reflective accounts of intercultural communication practices rather than surface-level observations.

The number of participants was determined by analytical saturation rather than numerical adequacy. By the fourth interview, recurring patterns related to language choice, religious tolerance, in-group preference, and adaptive communication strategies had consistently emerged, indicating that additional interviews were unlikely to generate substantively new analytical insights. In qualitative case study research, depth of meaning and contextual richness are prioritized over sample size, particularly when the research seeks to examine communication processes rather than population trends.

Most informants described the frequent use of Bahasa Indonesia as a shared communicative medium in interethnic interaction, while one informant emphasized a preference for intra-ethnic communication due to cultural familiarity. This contrast highlights the coexistence of communicative adaptation and ethnic homophily within everyday social interaction.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study employed three primary qualitative techniques: direct observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis.

Non-participant observation was conducted during various social contexts such as community meetings, religious events, and informal public interactions. The researcher did not engage directly in the activities but observed communication behaviors, patterns of verbal and non-verbal interaction, and instances of code-switching between languages or dialects. Detailed field notes were systematically recorded to capture nuances in intercultural exchanges.

In-depth interviews were carried out using a semi-structured format guided by open-ended questions informed by Gudykunst's Intercultural Communication Theory. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 min. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and supplemented with local dialects when necessary to facilitate more natural and expressive responses. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Document analysis was also conducted to support data triangulation and contextual depth. The reviewed documents included village administrative records, cultural activity logs, and demographic profiles, which provided complementary insights into the socio-cultural landscape of the community.

All audio recordings and observation notes were transcribed and prepared for qualitative coding. Data saturation was achieved by the fourth interview, at which point no new substantive themes emerged.

Variables and Operational Definitions

This study investigated key dimensions of intercultural communication, operationalized in alignment with Gudykunst's Intercultural Communication Theory. These variables were defined to capture how cultural differences are expressed, negotiated, and managed in the daily interactions of residents within the multicultural community of Desa Lilimori.

Linguistic interaction was examined as the first core variable. It was operationalized through indicators such as language choice in intercultural dialogue, the frequency of code-switching between local dialects and Bahasa Indonesia, and instances of communicative breakdowns arising from linguistic differences.

The second variable, religious expression, was assessed by exploring how individuals communicate in interfaith contexts. This included expressions of tolerance or intolerance, perceived mutual respect, and shared participation in religious or community rituals that involve multiple faith groups.

Cultural perception served as the third variable, focusing on individuals' attitudes toward cultural differences, awareness of stereotypes, and their interpretations of miscommunication triggered by contrasting values, customs, or social norms.

Lastly, adaptability was defined as the degree to which individuals demonstrated behavioral flexibility, openness to alternative cultural norms, and their ability to manage or resolve conflicts in intercultural settings. This variable served to evaluate how effectively members of the community navigate the complexities of a culturally diverse environment.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of four iterative phases: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview transcripts and observational notes were coded using thematic content analysis. NVivo software (version 12) was employed to organize, manage, and systematically code qualitative data, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and emergent themes related to intercultural communication practices, enabling factors, and barriers.

Analytical rigor was ensured through systematic and transparent coding procedures, allowing for a clear analytical progression from raw interview data to theoretically informed thematic categories aligned with intercultural communication theory. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and document analysis was applied to enhance credibility, while researcher reflexivity and analytic memo writing were conducted throughout the research process to minimize bias and strengthen interpretive transparency.

Although limited numerical expressions appear in the presentation of findings, these are used solely as narrative descriptors to indicate variation in participants' perspectives rather than as quantitative measurements or inferential claims. Accordingly, the study remains firmly situated within a qualitative interpretive paradigm and does not adopt a mixed-method design.

Results

Intercultural Communication in the Multicultural Community of Lilimori Village, West Sulawesi

This study was conducted over two months in Desa Lilimori, Kecamatan Bulutaba, Kabupaten Pasangkayu, Sulawesi Barat. Data were gathered through direct observation and in-depth interviews with four individuals representing different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Among the four informants, 75% described active participation in intercultural communication using Bahasa Indonesia, while 25% acknowledged minimal contact due to social withdrawal and perceived cultural barriers.

Language Use and Interethnic Communication

Language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a carrier of cultural identity. In Lilimori, Bahasa Indonesia serves as the unifying medium across diverse ethnic groups, while local languages continue to be used within families or intra-ethnic contexts. As Mukaddah (45) explained: *"I've lived in Lilimori village for almost 25 years, and I can't seem to shake off the Lombok language. Even when I speak Indonesian, I still have a Lombok accent. Likewise, even though our children were born in Lilimori, I still teach them Lombok".*

This illustrates how ethnic identity is preserved through dialects, even as Bahasa Indonesia facilitates broader intercultural interaction. Mukaddah also emphasized the shift to Bahasa Indonesia during interethnic encounters: "As fellow Lombok people, we use our own language, Lombok, to communicate on a daily basis. Except when we are communicating with one or more people from other ethnicities, in which case we usually use Indonesian. However, within the family, we still use Lombok, unless there is a mixed marriage (Lombok and Bugis), as is the case with me and several other residents, in which case Indonesian is used*".*

Nurhani (50) noted that many residents prefer interacting within their own ethnic circles: *"Lombok people are also known for their speaking style (accent) but only a few of them socialize with each other, as do Balinese and NTT people, they are more comfortable interacting with each other, especially since they have their own residences surrounded only by their own people, but they will still use Indonesian when interacting with other people".*

Prihatin (52), a Javanese resident, described her adaptation to local speech patterns in everyday interactions: *"I've lived in Lilimori village for 20 years, and I live next door to people of a different ethnicity. I interact with them by greeting them or having interests with them. They also speak a different language style than I do, and I try to understand them, sometimes even imitating theirs".*

These findings indicate that Bahasa Indonesia functions as a pragmatic communicative bridge that facilitates social coordination across ethnic boundaries while simultaneously allowing ethnic identities to remain salient.

Religious Practices and Tolerance

Religious life in Desa Lilimori reflects Indonesia's broader pluralism, with Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, and Hinduism all practiced. According to Mukaddah (45): *"Here in Lilimori village, there is a diversity of religions, including Islam, Hinduism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Confucianism and Buddhism are absent. We respect each other's religious celebrations and holidays because we have lived side by side for so long, and we maintain strong interfaith tolerance".*

However, misunderstandings can still arise. One case involved a sound conflict between Muslim and Hindu worship times: *"Because we live side by side with other religions and maybe there is miscommunication between us, there was once a misunderstanding between us, Islam and Hinduism, because when we wanted to perform Maghrib prayers, Hindus played loud music so we couldn't focus on praying, that's because we didn't know, Hindus said there was Islamic worship at that hour".*

Despite such incidents, religious tolerance remains a core community value, reinforced by daily coexistence and shared experiences.

Cultural Values and Norms

In this multicultural village, shared values such as tolerance, cooperation, and fairness serve as stabilizing forces. Frederikus (39), from East Nusa Tenggara, emphasized how local interactions led to mutual cultural adaptation: *"Almost all ethnic groups use their own regional languages when speaking. Usually, if you accidentally meet someone, they will speak in their regional language, so it's common to hear their language. Initially, I heard the term (Mi, ji) which comes from the language of the people of South Sulawesi. Until we started to get used to the accent, over time, we Easterners were able to understand the term a little bit, and the good thing is that the ethnic groups in Lilimori village want to mingle with us Easterners".*

He also stressed the importance of communication sensitivity: *"Here, when interacting with other ethnic groups, we must be able to control our words. We cannot joke with them directly because usually people think it is good, but it is not good. Well, I think, especially us government employees, we must be able to interact well with the local community".*

Prihatin (54) echoed similar sentiments regarding equity in social and work contexts: *"Here, the people of Lilimori village are fair to everyone, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or race. We can also be fair in our work by not discriminating against coworkers based on their religion or background".*

These insights affirm that cultural values are not static but negotiated in daily practice.

Perception and Cultural Awareness

Intercultural perception plays a critical role in shaping understanding. Differences in tone, speech volume, or expression are interpreted through cultural filters. Prihatin (54) described her recognition of communicative style differences: *"We are trying to understand the tone of voice or intonation of other cultures. It seems that Makassarese people usually speak quite loudly and enthusiastically, their way of speaking is different from us Javanese people who are known for their soft and gentle way of speaking, but we are used to hearing it, because we are used to speaking with Makassarese people who are good people, but their way of speaking is firm and full of enthusiasm".*

Frederikus (39) emphasized mutual respect as essential for cultural harmony: "*I think every culture is unique and has its own beauty. So if we meet people who have differences, we must respect each other's cultural differences and learn from each other. For example, I am from NTT, we also usually say Tabe' when talking to Bugis people, because here in Lilimori village, the dominant community is from South Sulawesi, which is known by the term 'mappatabe'. Cultural differences are a wealth that we must preserve. By respecting cultural differences, we can learn and grow from each other*".

These perspectives demonstrate that intercultural awareness in Lilimori is shaped by lived experience, long-term exposure, and the willingness to embrace cultural plurality.

Facilitating Factors in Intercultural Communication in a Multicultural Society

Mutual Acceptance and Respect

Mutual acceptance is a cornerstone of sustainable intercultural communication. Decades of coexistence have cultivated an environment of respect across cultural and religious boundaries. Residents actively engage in and appreciate cultural traditions beyond their own. As Mukaddah (45) noted: *"The people of Lilimori village here generally accept and respect other cultures, even religions, just like we Lombok people can appreciate Balinese culture in every religious or cultural event, usually Balinese people have an event called 'Nyepi' before the event they usually burn ogo-ogo around Lilimori village and many other tribes come to watch the ogo-ogo burning event, we village people have accepted and respect other cultures because we are used to living side by side".*

This sentiment is reinforced by Prihatin (54): *"All the villagers here maintain harmony by accepting differences and respecting all aspects of other ethnic cultures. For example, when I interact with my neighbor, who is predominantly Bugis, I accept the differences, and he does too. There's a Javanese term called "bicara", which means mutual understanding between people, thus maintaining harmony".*

Such acceptance not only reduces the risk of conflict but also reinforces a collective sense of harmony and mutual understanding.

Adaptability and Social Engagement

Adaptability emerged as a vital enabler in Lilimori's multicultural setting. The capacity to adjust to diverse norms and perspectives facilitates smoother communication across groups. Frederikus (39), who interacts daily with individuals of different backgrounds, observed: *"Yes, we are here as a pluralistic society, including immigrants who live and work here. We have good relations with other cultures. Moreover, when we work, we always meet and interact and often exchange ideas. The important thing is that we respect each other even though we have different ethnicities and cultures".*

This adaptability supports interethnic cooperation, particularly in work and neighborhood interactions where mutual dependency reinforces inclusiveness.

Inhibiting Factors in Intercultural Communication in a Multicultural Society

Social Reclusion and In-Group Bias

Despite overarching tolerance, many residents show a tendency to limit interactions to those of the same ethnic group, often due to shared cultural familiarity and physical

proximity. Mukaddah (45) explained: *"Here, the village community is more likely to interact with other tribes because of course there are many similarities between them, especially since they live in the same environment, where they also have positive experiences with each other".*

Such in-group preference limits intercultural exposure and can lead to social fragmentation, especially in daily routines and localized social networks.

Cultural Stereotyping and Heterophily

Stereotypes persist as subtle inhibitors of open intercultural dialogue. While general coexistence is peaceful, some ethnic distinctions are still interpreted as fixed personality traits. As Nurhani (50) explained: *"I rarely interact with other ethnic groups on a daily basis because they live in the inner part of Lilimori village. The community is indeed tolerant here, but they still socialize only with their own kind. For example, the NTT tribe, where socializing with others has occurred, has caused conflict between youths because, as I've seen, some of the ethnic groups are tough and hardworking. Therefore, until now, I rarely interact with other ethnic groups except during village events".*

These views illustrate how heterophily, the tendency to avoid what is unfamiliar, continues to shape social behaviors and limit deeper integration.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that intercultural communication in Desa Lilimori is not primarily sustained through deep intercultural integration, but rather through pragmatic adaptation and situational negotiation. Although residents from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds interact regularly and maintain visible social harmony, such harmony is largely achieved through communicative restraint, shared practical norms, and selective engagement. These patterns suggest that intercultural communication in rural multicultural settings operates within implicit social boundaries shaped by familiarity, perceived difference, and everyday proximity.

Intercultural Interaction in Public and Proximal Spaces

Daily intercultural interaction in Desa Lilimori predominantly occurs in public and semi-public spaces, particularly the village market and neighborhood environments. The market functions as a central arena for cross-cultural encounters where ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity is routinely displayed. In these spaces, interaction is guided by widely shared social norms such as greeting, politeness, and mutual respect, which serve as basic communicative frameworks enabling cooperation across cultural differences (12).

Beyond public interaction, proximity-based communication among neighbors plays a crucial role in sustaining everyday coexistence. Regular encounters foster familiarity and reduce interpersonal uncertainty, yet they do not necessarily translate into deeper intercultural engagement. Instead, proximity facilitates functional adaptation rather than cultural integration, indicating that repeated interaction alone is insufficient to dissolve cultural boundaries in multicultural rural communities. This pattern suggests that social harmony in Desa Lilimori is maintained more through pragmatic accommodation and routine social practices than through sustained intercultural dialogue or the formation of shared cultural identities.

Language Use as a Mechanism of Intercultural Boundary Management

Language emerges as a central mechanism through which intercultural communication is regulated in Desa Lilimori. Bahasa Indonesia functions as a shared communicative medium in cross-ethnic interaction, enabling residents to communicate effectively despite linguistic and cultural differences (13). Conversely, intra-ethnic communication within households and close social circles continues to rely on native languages, reflecting the persistence of ethnic identity in everyday life.

This pattern aligns with intercultural communication perspectives that conceptualize language not only as a technical instrument but as a carrier of cultural meaning that shapes interpretation, emotional resonance, and interactional norms (14). While the use of Bahasa Indonesia reduces surface-level communicative uncertainty, it simultaneously reinforces symbolic boundaries by limiting intercultural interaction to functional purposes. Thus, language choice becomes a strategy for maintaining coexistence without requiring cultural convergence.

Consistent with Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) framework, these findings demonstrate that effective intercultural communication depends on individuals' capacity to regulate anxiety and uncertainty during intercultural encounters (15, 16). In Lilimori, residents manage communicative risk by balancing openness with restraint, ensuring social stability while avoiding deeper intercultural exposure that may generate discomfort or misunderstanding.

Religious Tolerance as Pragmatic Coexistence

Religious diversity in Desa Lilimori is characterized by a high degree of tolerance, yet this tolerance is enacted pragmatically rather than dialogically. Residents from different religious backgrounds interact respectfully and adjust their behavior to accommodate religious practices and sacred times. Misunderstandings related to ritual observance occasionally occur, but they are typically resolved through informal negotiation and mutual accommodation.

This pattern corresponds with previous studies on intercultural and interreligious communication in rural Indonesian contexts, which highlight tolerance as a practical strategy for coexistence rather than a reflection of deep theological engagement (17). In Lilimori, intercultural communication within religious systems functions to minimize social friction and preserve communal harmony, suggesting that tolerance is sustained through behavioral regulation rather than ideological integration.

Cultural Values and the Maintenance of Social Balance

Shared cultural values play a foundational role in sustaining intercultural communication in Desa Lilimori. Values such as tolerance, openness, solidarity, and mutual respect are internalized through repeated interaction and social necessity. These values encourage residents to engage across cultural boundaries while simultaneously respecting cultural differences.

Multicultural values rooted in local wisdom emphasize empathy, interdependence, and mutual protection as key elements of social harmony (18). In Lilimori, the absence of ethnic dominance contributes to a balanced cultural dynamic in which no single group monopolizes social norms. This equilibrium supports inclusive interaction while reinforcing a collective commitment to peaceful coexistence.

Perception, Stereotyping, and Communicative Restraint

Intercultural perception in Desa Lilimori is shaped by accumulated experience and repeated interaction. Residents develop culturally specific perceptions of different ethnic groups based on observable practices, traditions, and social behavior. While increased contact often leads to a more nuanced understanding over time (19). These perceptions frequently coexist with simplified cultural generalizations.

Previous studies indicate that such perceptions foster mutual restraint, whereby individuals consciously avoid behaviors considered inappropriate or offensive to other groups as a sign of cultural respect (20, 21). However, stereotypes continue to function as cognitive shortcuts that reduce uncertainty while simultaneously limiting openness. As Houghton *et al*. (2013) argue, stereotypes are emotionally grounded and restrict analytical engagement, thereby constraining the depth of intercultural communication (22).

Enabling and Inhibiting Factors in Intercultural Communication

Several factors enable intercultural communication in Desa Lilimori, including collective acceptance of diversity, communicative adaptability, and shared national identity. The ability to manage heterophily, or engagement across difference, depends on fostering inclusive environments that encourage tolerance and cultural awareness (23). Communication competence in this context involves sensitivity to diverse values and norms, as well as the capacity to adapt communicative behavior accordingly (24).

Nevertheless, intercultural communication remains constrained by inhibiting factors. Ethnic homophily continues to structure social relationships, as residents often prefer interaction within culturally similar groups (25). While this strengthens in-group cohesion, it limits sustained intercultural learning. Additionally, persistent stereotypes reinforce social distance and inhibit deeper engagement, thereby maintaining functional harmony at the expense of intercultural integration (26).

Intercultural Harmony as Situational Negotiation

Overall, the findings suggest that intercultural harmony in Desa Lilimori is best understood as the outcome of situational negotiation rather than deep intercultural integration. Residents continuously regulate their communicative behavior to manage uncertainty, minimize risk, and preserve social balance. Harmony is achieved through the strategic maintenance of cultural boundaries rather than their dissolution.

This challenges normative assumptions in intercultural communication literature that equate harmony with openness or integration. Instead, the Lilimori case demonstrates that effective intercultural communication in rural multicultural contexts is relational, pragmatic, and contextually constrained. By extending Gudykunst's AUM framework into a non-institutional rural setting, this study underscores the need to reconceptualize intercultural competence as a locally situated practice shaped by everyday social realities.

Conclusion

This study examines intercultural communication in Desa Lilimori as a form of long-term rural multicultural coexistence. The findings show that social harmony in this context is sustained not through deep intercultural integration, but through pragmatic communicative strategies that manage cultural difference, uncertainty, and social risk in everyday interaction.

Using Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management framework, the study demonstrates that shared language use, communicative restraint, and situational adaptation enable residents to maintain stable and predictable social relations. While these strategies reduce anxiety and prevent overt conflict, they also reinforce implicit cultural boundaries through ethnic homophily and managed social distance. As a result, intercultural communication remains functional and cooperative, yet limited in depth.

These findings suggest that multicultural harmony should not be automatically equated with intercultural integration. Instead, harmony in rural multicultural settings is better understood as a negotiated condition sustained through the strategic management of difference rather than the dissolution of cultural boundaries. This challenges normative assumptions in intercultural communication literature that associate tolerance with openness or integration.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of AUM theory to a rural, non-institutional context. Practically, it highlights the importance of context-sensitive approaches that recognize pragmatic coexistence as a legitimate form of social stability. Given its qualitative and localized scope, future research may pursue comparative or longitudinal studies to further explore the relationship between harmony, distance, and intercultural communication competence.

Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicting interest.

Data Availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was not required for this study.

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Additional Information

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