

Intercultural Communication Strategies: Elevating Indonesian Identity Reinforcement for Migrant Children in Malaysia

Sarah Aqila¹, Arina Rohmatul Hidayah²

^{1,2}Islamic University of Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri, Indonesia

^{1,2}Jl. KH. Wachid Hasyim 64114 Kecamatan Mojoroto Kota Kediri, Indonesia

¹hi.saraqaqila@gmail.com, ²arinarohmatulh@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the complex identity negotiations of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia, who occupy a liminal cultural space characterized by simultaneous immersion in the host society's linguistic environment and tenuous connections to their Indonesian national identity, attenuated by geographic and temporal distance. Grounded in Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), the research investigates the role of culturally embedded language education, particularly through the BIPA program, alongside value-driven non-formal learning anchored in Pancasila philosophy, and targeted psychosocial interventions. These integrated strategies, implemented under the auspices of Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) in collaboration with SARBUMUSI and PCINU Malaysia, collectively foster resilient and dynamic national subjectivities among the diaspora youth. By transcending reductive binaries of integration versus identity preservation, this study advances a culturally responsive communication framework essential for navigating and reconciling these tensions. Empirical findings underscore that sustaining a robust diaspora identity requires multidimensional engagement—encompassing active community participation, affective connection, and deep cultural literacy—which positions intercultural communication as a critical mechanism for maintaining national identity continuity amid the challenges posed by globalization and migratory flux. Ensuring that these children do not experience alienation from their homeland is vital for nurturing enduring pride as Indonesians, bolstering self-confidence, and inspiring the motivation necessary for maximizing their developmental potential towards achieving improved life trajectories.

Keywords: *intercultural communication, national identity, migrant children, non-formal education, Malaysia.*

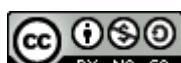
Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji negosiasi identitas yang kompleks pada anak-anak pekerja migran Indonesia di Malaysia, yang menempati ruang budaya liminal—ditandai oleh keterlibatan simultan dalam lingkungan bahasa masyarakat tuan rumah dan hubungan yang rapuh terhadap identitas kebangsaan Indonesia akibat jarak geografis dan temporal. Dengan berlandaskan pada kerangka *Intercultural Communication Competence* (ICC), studi ini menelusuri peran pendidikan

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bahasa yang berorientasi budaya, khususnya melalui program BIPA, serta pembelajaran non-formal berbasis nilai-nilai Pancasila dan intervensi psikososial yang terarah. Strategi terpadu ini, yang diimplementasikan melalui kolaborasi antara Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), SARBUMUSI, dan PCINU Malaysia, secara kolektif mendorong terbentuknya subjektivitas kebangsaan yang tangguh dan dinamis di kalangan anak-anak diaspora. Dengan melampaui dikotomi reduksionis antara integrasi dan pelestarian identitas, penelitian ini menawarkan kerangka komunikasi yang responsif secara budaya untuk menjembatani ketegangan tersebut. Temuan empiris menunjukkan bahwa keberlanjutan identitas diaspora yang kuat membutuhkan keterlibatan multidimensional—yang mencakup partisipasi aktif dalam komunitas, koneksi afektif, serta literasi budaya yang mendalam. Komunikasi antarbudaya, dalam konteks ini, menjadi mekanisme kunci dalam mempertahankan kontinuitas identitas nasional di tengah tantangan globalisasi dan dinamika migrasi. Upaya untuk mencegah keterasingan anak-anak ini dari tanah air sangat penting dalam menumbuhkan kebanggaan sebagai warga negara Indonesia, memperkuat kepercayaan diri, serta membangkitkan motivasi untuk mengoptimalkan potensi diri menuju kehidupan yang lebih baik.

Kata kunci: komunikasi antarbudaya, identitas nasional, anak migran, pendidikan non-formal, Malaysia.

Introduction

Malaysia is one of the countries whose workers come from Indonesia. Indonesian migrant workers mostly become manual laborers, so many Indonesians migrate for up to a dozen years to make a living (Qomariyah et al., 2024). In an era marked by intensified transnational mobility and cultural hybridity, the concept of national identity has become increasingly complex—especially for children of migrant families who grow up in host societies with sociocultural systems distinct from their countries of origin. One such case is that of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia, who experience a dual sense of cultural orientation: on one hand, their familial and ethnic identity is rooted in Indonesia; on the other, their social environment and everyday communication are shaped by Malaysian cultural and linguistic norms.

Nationalism represents a core value that must be cultivated from early childhood, particularly in the context of Malaysia, where Indonesian migrant children frequently encounter difficulties in preserving their national identity. These challenges stem from the dominant influence of the host country's majority culture and the limited availability of education in the Indonesian language. Within this study, cultural nationalism is conceptualized as a deep-rooted sense of identity and emotional connection to the cultural heritage, language, and core values of the Indonesian nation. Nationalism is important for Indonesian children as an understanding that shows they are part of Indonesia. Therefore, strengthening nationalism in Indonesian children is very important because it will form a strong foundation

for future generations to become responsible citizens, respect diversity, and be ready to contribute to building a better future for Indonesia (Putri et al., 2024)

The research seeks to investigate how intercultural communication strategies, grounded in cultural and linguistic frameworks—such as the integration of folklore and regional songs—can effectively strengthen the sense of cultural nationalism among Indonesian migrant children between the ages of 8 and 12 at SBPP (Sanggar Bimbingan Puchong Perdana). Children between the ages of 8 to 12 are in a crucial developmental stage—what developmental psychologists refer to as the “identity formation phase”—where they begin to question their belonging, cultural origin, and future trajectories. If this developmental window lacks sufficient cultural reinforcement, the likelihood of complete cultural assimilation into the host society increases, often at the cost of heritage identity. Effective communication plays a crucial role in fostering harmony among people of different religious beliefs, serving as a foundation for a tolerant society. Through the process of communication, individuals are able to shape their self-concept and achieve self-actualization, helping to reduce tension and conflict in relationships. Moreover, communication creates opportunities for mutual understanding between individuals or groups and strengthens social bonds, even among those with differing faiths.

In a multicultural-immigrant society, distinctive ethnic and cultural identity salience issues (e.g., ethnic-oriented, assimilated, bicultural, or marginal identity issues) and intergroup relationship concerns play a prominent role in the INT framework (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2015). ICC is particularly relevant in diaspora settings, where children must continuously navigate dual or even multiple cultural codes. Effective communication strategies can help children reconcile their cultural hybridity and develop a strong, multidimensional sense of identity. Drawing from the INT framework, intercultural communication competence is conceptualized as the optimal integration of the necessary culture and ethnic-identity sensitive knowledge, ethnorelative attitudes, and interaction skills to manage identity-based issues appropriately, effectively, and adaptively and to achieve desired identity outcomes with interpretive attunement (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2015)

The concept of *Intercultural Communication Competence* (ICC) refers to an individual's capacity to communicate both effectively and appropriately in cross-cultural contexts. Guo-Ming Chen and William Starosta present a comprehensive review of the literature on

intercultural communication competence. These authors detail why the concept of intercultural competence is increasingly important, develop a conceptual model of intercultural communication competence, and then review research on each of three components of intercultural competence (affective, cognitive, and behavioral). Within migrant communities, ICC plays a pivotal role in mediating the often divergent systems of values, norms, and communicative practices that emerge between the culture of origin and that of the host environment. These findings resonate strongly in the context of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia, who are raised within socio-educational systems that diverge significantly from those of Indonesia, despite surface-level cultural similarities.

As articulated by Benedict Anderson (1991) in his seminal concept of the "imagined community," cleared a path through two impasses generated by prior works. First, against the quest for a positivist, definitional determination of the nation, he directed attention to the affectively resonant "style" through which nations are imagined. Second, it moved discussions beyond the previous impasse of adjudicating between the reality versus the fiction of the nation concept. This analytical clearing of the field was a prelude to a more programmatic sociohistorical ambition. IC was concerned less with the origin and trajectory of a specific nationalist movement than with the conditions that made the nation thinkable (Goswami, 2020) Within the context of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia, this issue becomes particularly acute. Despite linguistic similarities and geographic proximity, the socio-cultural ecosystem in which these children are embedded often lacks the explicit reinforcement of Indonesian cultural identity. This creates a vacuum in which national identity may be overshadowed by more dominant host-country narratives, leading to subtle but significant forms of cultural detachment.

In host countries like Malaysia, where children of Indonesian migrant workers often grow up immersed in dominant local cultures and educational systems that do not prioritize or even recognize their cultural heritage, the risk of identity dislocation becomes pronounced. Over time, without structured communicative reinforcement of Indonesian language, values, and traditions, these children may experience cultural displacement, manifesting as a weakening emotional affiliation with their ancestral homeland. To serve as an effective instrument for the purpose of intercultural communication, language instruction must place greater importance on the way in which a language is tied to a cultural pattern (Piller, 2011) Thus, the task of reinforcing Indonesian national identity in such settings is not merely a matter of cultural preservation, but rather a complex communicative endeavor that requires deliberate, sustained, and context-sensitive strategies. It calls for the active construction of communicative environments—both

formal and non-formal—where children can engage with Indonesian cultural symbols, linguistic practices, and national narratives in a way that fosters emotional resonance and cognitive internalization.

For children of migrant backgrounds, particularly those residing in transnational and multicultural environments, national identity is not an automatic inheritance passed down through lineage or citizenship alone. Rather, it is a socially and communicatively constructed experience, dynamically shaped—or conversely, gradually eroded—through continuous exposure to language, cultural narratives, interpersonal interaction, and symbolic rituals. In this regard, the formation of national identity is a discursive process that unfolds over time, contingent on the quality and frequency of communicative engagement with culturally embedded content. For children growing up in migrant or transnational settings, national identity is not an innate or automatic inheritance, but rather a fluid and socially constructed experience, continuously shaped—and potentially diminished—through the rhythms of everyday life. It is forged through daily communicative practices, exposure to language and cultural symbols, participation in educational activities, and engagement with rituals that carry symbolic meaning. These mechanisms serve as the scaffolding upon which identity is built, negotiated, and internalized. However, when these communicative channels are fragmented, inconsistent, or entirely absent—as is often the case in diaspora contexts—the construction of national identity becomes precarious.

Diaspora refers to a community of people who have been dispersed from their original homeland to two or more locations, often maintaining strong emotional, cultural, and symbolic connections to that homeland. As a consequence of such paradigmatic shift in conceptualization of diaspora, the genre has moved away from a tragic mode linked to the experience of diaspora as loss, nostalgia and a longing for the past. It embraces the appealing theme of positive immigration and self reinvention abroad. Consequently, it has become increasingly divorced from the notion of exile and closer to that of residence in a foreign country. It is an arena for the creative melding of cultures and the formation of new hybrid (Bhandari, 2021)

This perspective positions communication not merely as a conduit for transmitting national values, but as a constitutive force in the very making of national identity. In diaspora contexts, where competing cultural narratives often intersect, it becomes imperative to construct intentional communicative spaces that reaffirm heritage identity without negating the realities

of the host culture. Such spaces are essential not only for sustaining national pride, but also for equipping children with the cultural literacy and confidence necessary to navigate multicultural societies without compromising their roots.

This study was conducted at the Sanggar Bimbingan Puchong Perdana (SBPP), located in Selangor, Malaysia, during the period of April to May 2025. The selection of SBPP as the research site was based on its status as a non-formal educational institution that plays a significant role in providing structured learning opportunities for Indonesian migrant children in the region. SBPP is known for its consistent efforts to deliver culturally responsive education, including the integration of Indonesian language and values-based instruction grounded in Pancasila and character building. The decision to carry out the research during the months of April and May was made with consideration of SBPP's academic calendar and teaching rhythm, which remains relatively stable during this period. This timing enabled researchers to conduct in-depth observations of ongoing learning activities, as well as to assess the outcomes of instructional programs implemented throughout the semester.

Furthermore, conducting the research near the end of the academic cycle allowed for a more holistic evaluation of students' engagement with cultural content and their developmental progress in relation to identity formation. All research activities adhered strictly to ethical research standards, including obtaining formal permission from the SBPP administrative authorities and securing informed consent from the parents or guardians of participating students.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, aiming to thoroughly explore the intercultural communication strategies used to reinforce Indonesian national identity among the children of Indonesian migrant workers living in Malaysia. The qualitative nature of the study enables an in-depth examination of complex cultural negotiations, affective dimensions of belonging, and identity construction processes experienced by diaspora youth who live within the tension of dual cultural frameworks. Rather than seeking generalizable outcomes, this research focuses on the richness of lived experiences, the symbolic and linguistic representations of identity, and the role of institutions and communities in shaping intercultural competence and national attachment. By adopting a subjective epistemology, the study recognizes that meaning is co-constructed between the researcher and participants through dialogic interaction, making the researcher not a neutral observer but an engaged interpreter within the social field. This process

was a collaborative effort with local educators and community members to create a comprehensive resource that integrates cultural content and values (Nabilah et al., 2025)

The research adopts a descriptive case study design, centered on Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) as a formal institutional site that functions not only as an educational provider but also as a cultural and ideological transmitter of Indonesian identity. The choice of SIKL as the focal case is strategic: it represents an embedded cultural hub within the Malaysian context, offering insights into how diaspora children are systematically socialized into national narratives despite geographic and socio-cultural distance from Indonesia. SIKL serves as a key arena where national identity is cultivated through structured curriculum, language instruction, cultural celebrations, and civic education. In addition, the study examines the roles of SARBUMUSI and PCINU Malaysia, two Indonesian community-based organizations operating in Malaysia that contribute significantly to informal cultural education, religious instruction, and psychosocial support aimed at maintaining Indonesian values among the migrant population. These entities form a hybrid ecosystem of formal and non-formal learning, creating what can be termed diasporic cultural infrastructure—deeply rooted in the philosophies of Pancasila and religious-national ethics. The inclusion of both school-based and community-based sites allows for a more comprehensive view of how identity is constructed and maintained across different social spaces.

Data collection utilizes three primary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews will be conducted with a diverse group including migrant children enrolled in SIKL (aged 8–12), two BIPA and civics teachers, community organizers from SARBUMUSI and PCINU, as well as four parents and guardians. The interview instruments, developed based on intercultural communication theory, focus on participants' experiences related to learning the Indonesian language, internalizing national values, and engaging with Indonesian culture within both formal and informal contexts. These open-ended interviews allow participants to articulate their narratives, perceptions, and challenges in navigating dual cultural identities and maintaining a sense of belonging. Participant observation is conducted during classroom activities, cultural programs, and religious or civic events, enabling direct witnessing of communicative practices, symbolic rituals, and interpersonal dynamics that inform identity construction. Observation notes include verbal and nonverbal cues, use of space and symbols, and emotional tone, essential for understanding

embodied aspects of identity formation. Document analysis is conducted on the SBPP curriculum, learning materials, community publications, and activity reports to gain a comprehensive understanding of the learning strategies implemented.

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation is applied across all data sources and methods, while member checking is performed with key informants to validate interpretive accuracy. Thick descriptions and reflective field notes foreground the researcher's positionality and enhance transparency. The researcher engages in prolonged immersion to develop contextual sensitivity regarding the diasporic environment. Ethical considerations include informed consent, protection of minors' identities through pseudonymization, and cultural sensitivity. Additional ethical scrutiny addresses interactions with child participants, ensuring age-appropriate language, psychological safety, and guardian involvement in consent. Overall, this methodology provides a robust and context-sensitive framework for understanding how intercultural communication sustains Indonesian identity across borders, generations, and shifting cultural terrains.

Result and Discussion

The development of cross-cultural or multicultural understanding constitutes a foundational element in foreign language education, particularly in the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia as a second or heritage language. Cultural differences are something that cannot be avoided in social life. Especially in the life of people with very diverse social backgrounds. These differences lead to potential conflicts and divisions between social groups that can occur because of differences, interests, and customs. Apart from that, the current rapid flow of globalization also threatens a shift in several cultures that exist in several regions or countries in the world. Therefore, there is a need for revitalization efforts to make culture always able to coexist and continue to be preserved in people's daily lives. One way is to integrate the local culture or wisdom through education (Yulianeta et al., 2024). The verbal aspects relate to the culturally appropriate use of language—including lexical choices, syntactic structures, and communicative expressions that align with the socio-cultural context of interaction. Meanwhile, the non-verbal elements—such as body posture, eye contact, and culturally coded gestures—play an equally essential role in conveying meaning and maintaining intercultural rapport.

The context of Indonesian labor migration to Malaysia provides the essential backdrop for understanding the intercultural identity formation of migrant children. Malaysia has long been a primary destination for Indonesian migrant workers, particularly in sectors such as domestic work, construction, plantation, and informal labor. Driven by limited employment

opportunities, economic disparity, and regional development gaps in Indonesia, many families seek better livelihoods across the border. According to data from Indonesia's National Agency for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BP2MI), Malaysia consistently ranks among the top receiving countries for Indonesian labor, with hundreds of thousands of workers residing there both legally and irregularly. A significant yet often overlooked dimension of this migration is the transnational movement of families—particularly the inclusion of children. While labor migration is typically characterized by separation between breadwinners and dependents, many Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia choose to bring their children along, especially in long-term or semi-permanent stays. Several factors contribute to this decision: the unavailability of trustworthy caregivers in Indonesia, the desire to maintain family unity, and concerns about children's moral, religious, or educational upbringing if left behind. In many cases, the children are born in Malaysia or have lived there since early childhood, resulting in complex identity configurations shaped by both host and origin cultures.

John Locke suggests that education is an individual autonomy, effort and responsibility and it is at the core of the issue of development of a child's understanding. It is the education that a child receives that determines the way in which his understanding and character will develop, and for the vast majority of people a proper education is crucial if the child is to grow into an adult who will act according to his justified reason. Most countries in the world stipulate that education is a constitutional right given to their citizens, adopting the stipulation, right to education appeared when social rights become prominent in the 19th century when it was inserted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR), International Covenant of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights 1966 (ICSECR) and in the Convention on Right of Child 1989 (CRC). It is the role of the state to ensure that the best interest of a child is adhered to and guaranteed.(Yusob, 2015)

However, bringing children abroad presents challenges, especially in access to formal education. Due to documentation issues and socio-legal vulnerability, many migrant children are excluded from Malaysia's public education system. This gap has prompted the establishment of Indonesian schools abroad, such as Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), as well as community-based education initiatives supported by Indonesian diasporic organizations. These schools and institutions not only serve as educational providers but also operate as sites for cultural preservation and national identity transmission—especially critical in a context where

assimilation pressures are high and national belonging may be diluted over time. In response, alternative Indonesian-run educational channels have emerged, such as community “Sanggar Bimbingan” spaces and formal institutions like Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), intended to circumvent policy constraints and provide these children with education and cultural continuity.

In an increasingly globalized and mobile world, the movement of people across borders brings about not only economic and political implications but also complex sociocultural dynamics. Among these is the issue of intercultural communication—a multidimensional process that underpins how individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact, negotiate meaning, and construct identities in contexts marked by diversity, inequality, and power asymmetries. Nowhere is this more evident than in the lived experiences of migrant communities, particularly children who are simultaneously undergoing developmental, linguistic, and cultural transitions.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory further elaborates this by identifying fundamental value orientations—such as individualism versus collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance—that vary across societies and shape communicative behavior. In the context of Indonesian children in Malaysia, these theoretical dimensions manifest in how children adapt to different classroom expectations, social hierarchies, and linguistic practices.

Within this complex socio-legal environment, our study reveals that national identity reinforcement among migrant children unfolds through both formal and informal cultural infrastructures. At SIKL, children are immersed in national rituals—anthem singing, language instruction, and patriotic commemorations—that not only nurture literacy and civic awareness but symbolically recreate an Indonesian “microcosm” abroad. Teachers articulate their pedagogical roles beyond academia, describing the education in ideological terms: *“We teach ideology—Pancasila, mutual cooperation, national heroes...”* These educational practices align with literature suggesting language serves as a vessel of collective memory and identity.

Children who demonstrate stronger proficiency in the Indonesian language generally exhibit more advanced levels of intercultural communicative competence. This observation aligns with the findings of (Ayu Purnamasari & Wira Jaya Hartono, 2023) in their study "The Importance of Using Indonesian in Higher Education", which argues that linguistic fluency in Indonesian is not merely a technical skill but a reflection of the learner's internalization of the language's embedded social and cultural values. Proficient language users tend to engage more

confidently in group interactions, allowing them to participate more meaningfully in collective experiences.

Table 1. Number of SBPP Students (Aged 8-12 Years)

Class	Female	Male
2	5	6
3	5	5
4	4	6

1. Recontextualizing the Flag Ceremony

One of the most powerful and enduring symbolic rituals in the Indonesian educational system is the weekly flag ceremony (upacara bendera), traditionally conducted every Monday morning in schools across the archipelago. This state-sanctioned ritual serves not merely as a patriotic gesture, but as a performative act of nation-building—embedding values such as nationalism, discipline, collective identity, and respect for authority. Within the Indonesian diaspora, particularly among undocumented or informal migrant communities in Malaysia, where access to formal education is often restricted, the reintroduction of this ritual in Sanggar Bimbingan (community learning centers) signifies more than cultural nostalgia—it becomes an intercultural communicative strategy for re-rooting identity in a transnational context.

In these diasporic settings, the flag ceremony is adapted to fit local constraints while retaining its core symbolic elements: the raising of the Merah Putih, singing of the national anthem (Indonesia Raya), and the recitation of Pancasila. Though modest in infrastructure, these rituals reflect a deliberate attempt to recreate Indonesian sociocultural spaces within the Malaysian milieu. Facilitators and educators, often themselves migrants or diaspora members, use these ceremonies not only as pedagogical tools but as communicative performances that transmit cultural values and norms to children navigating dual cultural realities.

From the perspective of intercultural communication theory, particularly Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), the flag ceremony in the Sanggar functions as a means of fostering cultural awareness, symbolic literacy, and identity negotiation. Children's participation in the ceremony contributes to the development of intercultural competence, encompassing cultural self-awareness, interpretive skills, and openness to diverse perspectives. By

learning to stand at attention, sing the anthem, and recite the foundational national ideology, they are not merely enacting a ritual; they are absorbing communicative codes that define Indonesian cultural membership.

Moreover, notion of identity as a “production” is particularly useful here. The children’s identity as Indonesians is not fixed or inherited—it is reproduced and performed through repeated engagement with culturally coded practices. The flag ceremony serves as one such performative site, where national identity is not simply remembered, but relived and reconstructed. This process becomes especially salient for children born or raised in Malaysia who may lack direct memory of Indonesia. For them, the ritual operates as a symbolic bridge between imagined national belonging and their current lived reality in a foreign cultural landscape.

The communicative significance of this ritual also lies in its nonverbal and symbolic modes—uniforms, body posture, flag salutes, and collective singing—which align with Hall’s theory of high-context communication in collectivist cultures. These symbols carry deep meaning without the need for explicit explanation; they invoke emotion, group solidarity, and identity affirmation through shared performance. In this way, the ritual becomes an intercultural pedagogical act, transmitting Indonesian cultural values while also equipping children to navigate cultural dissonance.

Importantly, the Sanggar’s adoption of the flag ceremony also reflects a strategic intercultural positioning. It asserts Indonesian cultural visibility within a Malaysian socio-political context where migrant communities often face marginalization or invisibility. Holding the ceremony—sometimes in semi-public spaces—functions as both internal reinforcement (of “Indonesian-ness” among children) and external signaling (of cultural presence to the host society). This aligns with Ting-Toomey’s (1999) identity negotiation theory, which emphasizes the active role of individuals and groups in negotiating their cultural identity through communicative interaction in multicultural settings.

In sum, the integration of flag ceremonies into Sanggar Bimbingan is not a mere replication of homeland rituals; it is a purposeful intercultural communicative act—one that anchors children in their cultural roots while preparing them to engage with the broader socio-cultural frameworks of their host society. It illustrates how intercultural communication is not limited to cross-cultural exchange but also includes internal cultural reaffirmation in transnational and diasporic contexts.



Figure 1. children leading a flag ceremony, showcasing civic and language learning outcomes

2. Balancing Dual Allegiances Through National Songs as Intercultural Communicative Practice

In the diasporic educational spaces occupied by Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia, the act of regularly singing national songs has evolved into a complex intercultural practice. On one hand, the structured singing of Indonesian patriotic songs—such as *Indonesia Raya*, *Satu Nusa Satu Bangsa*, *Indonesia Pusaka*, *Mengheningkan Cipta*, *Bagimu Negeri*, *Tanah Airku*, and *Yalal Wathon*—functions as a symbolic reaffirmation of cultural origin, embedding national values, historical consciousness, and emotional belonging. On the other, acknowledging and participating in the singing of *Negaraku*, the Malaysian national anthem, reflects a conscious orientation toward host-country respect and situational integration. Together, these musical rituals illustrate a dynamic form of intercultural communication, wherein children are educated to navigate multiple cultural identities with sensitivity, competence, and balance.

This dual engagement aligns with Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), particularly in the development of *savoir-être*—the disposition of curiosity, openness, and respect toward other cultures. While Indonesian songs serve to maintain the emotional and cultural memory of the homeland, the inclusion of Malaysian national symbols through *Negaraku* introduces children to the civic culture of their host country, fostering a sense of situational appropriateness, tolerance, and intercultural empathy.

Facilitators in Sanggar Bimbingan note that this practice is not without pedagogical intention. “*We teach them to love Indonesia, but we also teach them to respect Malaysia*,” explained one coordinator. “*We’re guests here—we must be grateful.*” This articulation demonstrates the

application of Ting-Toomey's Identity Negotiation Theory, which highlights the importance of managing multiple cultural identities through mindful communication strategies in intercultural spaces. The children, many of whom were born or have spent most of their lives in Malaysia, learn to perform both Indonesian and Malaysian identities in different sociocultural settings—without abandoning either.

Musically, this becomes a performative mode of intercultural identity negotiation. Singing Indonesia Raya instills national pride and emotional rootedness, especially during Indonesian events like Independence Day or flag-raising ceremonies. Meanwhile, singing Negaraku signals civic respect and inclusion, particularly in public events, joint community celebrations, or inter-ethnic collaborations. This dual musical literacy supports the children's development of bicultural competence, a key aspect in managing diasporic identity in a multicultural society. From a communication standpoint, these musical rituals are not just cultural expressions but semiotic systems—ritualized forms of symbolic interaction that transmit and reinforce social values. Following (Bai, 2016) theory of high-context cultures, both the Indonesian and Malaysian anthems carry emotional and historical weight that transcends their lyrics. For children, the bodily experience of singing together—standing in line, placing hands on their chests, responding to cues—functions as a deeply embodied form of cultural transmission and socialization.

Importantly, this intercultural approach avoids the pitfall of cultural essentialism, where one identity is rigidly imposed over the other. Instead, it reflects cultural fluidity, where identity is understood as relational, context-driven, and co-constructed. The practice also aligns with contemporary views of diaspora education, where national identity is not preserved in isolation but maintained through engagement with the sociocultural realities of the host environment.



Figure 2. of patriotic education for children using national songs in the classroom

3. National Films as Intercultural Pedagogy

Within the transnational and culturally hybrid contexts of Indonesian migrant communities in Malaysia, the educational development of children—particularly those excluded from formal schooling due to legal or socioeconomic constraints—requires alternative, culturally grounded pedagogical strategies. One such approach involves the strategic use of Indonesian national cinema as an affective and symbolic medium to transmit character values, national memory, and identity consciousness among diaspora children. Community-based learning centers such as Sanggar Bimbingan, supported by organizations like SARBUMUSI and PCINU Malaysia, have integrated curated film screenings as a pedagogical intervention to sustain cultural continuity and moral formation.

Films such as *Sang Kiai*, *Laskar Pelangi*, *Tanah Surga Katanya*, *Kartini*, and *Sang Pemimpi* serve as narrative vehicles of value transmission, presenting children with dramatizations of heroism, perseverance, civic morality, religious tolerance, and the pursuit of knowledge. These films construct accessible frameworks through which children, despite living outside the territorial bounds of the Indonesian nation-state, can engage with the symbolic and ethical foundations of their cultural identity. For example, *Sang Kiai* presents KH. Hasyim Asy'ari as a figure who embodies the convergence of Islamic ethics and national struggle, offering children a culturally resonant model of leadership, resistance, and sacrifice.

Drawing upon intercultural communication theory, particularly Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), the use of film in diaspora education fosters not only knowledge of cultural self (*savoir*) but also the capacity to critically reflect (*savoir s'engager*) on the values embedded in one's heritage. Films act as high-context communication texts (Hall, 1976), rich with implicit cultural codes—gestures, idioms, attire, social hierarchies—that require guided interpretation. Within Sanggar settings, facilitators mediate these screenings with reflective discussions, helping children to decode cultural meanings and relate them to their own lived experiences in Malaysia, where their sense of belonging is often fluid and contested.

In this sense, the use of film also aligns with Kim's (2001) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation, which posits that identity formation in intercultural contexts involves a dynamic tension between cultural retention and adaptive transformation. For children who may

have been born or raised in Malaysia, Indonesian films serve as symbolic anchors—cultivating emotional familiarity with a homeland they may never have physically encountered, while simultaneously supporting the development of bicultural competence necessary for navigating the Malaysian socio-cultural environment.

Furthermore, films provide a developmentally appropriate and emotionally engaging form of character education, particularly for young learners. Rather than imposing abstract moral values through didactic instruction, films offer embodied narratives in which values are modeled through characters, conflict, and consequence. The character-building messages embedded in *Laskar Pelangi*'s emphasis on education, Kartini's advocacy for gender equality, or Sang Kiai's portrayal of religious patriotism allow children to form affective bonds with national ideals through the moral dilemmas and victories of filmic protagonists.



Figure 3. of children watching an educational film as part of cultural and character-building activities

4. Daily Religious Practices as Cultural Transmission

One of the key findings of this study is the significant role of daily religious routines—specifically the memorization of short Qur'anic surahs and the habituation of daily prayers (doa-doa harian)—in reinforcing Indonesian cultural identity among the children of migrant workers.

While these practices are inherently religious, within the Indonesian context they function as deeply cultural acts, embedded in the national ethos and daily life across various regions.

These daily practices—implemented in structured settings such as Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) and reinforced through community-based programs supported by SARBUMUSI and PCINU Malaysia—serve as affective and embodied forms of cultural literacy. Unlike more formal pedagogical approaches, this kind of religious habituation operates at the level of ritualized repetition, where meaning is not only cognitively learned but also physically enacted and emotionally internalized. Through consistent engagement in these practices, children absorb values that are central to the Indonesian worldview—such as humility (*tawadhu'*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and respect (*hormat*). Importantly, this study also highlights the role of religious education, particularly the teaching of *tajwid* and *makhārij al-hurūf* in Qur'anic recitation (SINWAH), as a key practice in shaping not only the children's spiritual discipline but also their connection to a distinctly Indonesian-Muslim identity.

From a communication theory perspective, these religious routines can be understood through the lens of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), particularly in their role in developing cognitive, affective, and behavioral capacities needed to maintain a stable cultural identity amid foreign cultural influences. The memorization of short Qur'anic passages in Bahasa Indonesia (or accompanied by Indonesian explanations) acts as a linguistic-cultural bridge, ensuring the use of native language in spiritually meaningful contexts. This process fortifies language retention while also anchoring religious knowledge within an Indonesian moral-ethical framework.

Within the curriculum of Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) and associated religious education initiatives run by PCINU Malaysia and SARBUMUSI, *ubudiyah* education is not taught in isolation as doctrinal content, but as lived cultural practice, deeply aligned with the Indonesian expression of Islam—moderate, communal, and integrated into daily social norms. The pedagogy emphasizes not only correct ritual performance but also the internalization of *adab* (ethics) and the symbolic meanings behind each act, such as cleanliness, humility, and spiritual mindfulness. From an intercultural communication perspective, teaching *wudhu* and *sholat* becomes a form of nonverbal cultural communication—an embodied transmission of values through repeated actions.

Children learn to orient their bodies, time, and intentions in structured patterns, reinforcing discipline and focus. These embodied rituals become cultural scripts that communicate one's belonging to the Indonesian Muslim identity, both inwardly (to the self) and outwardly (to peers and community).



Figure 4. SINWAH program in action (innovation by our team), integrating Tahsin and Tilawah to enhance Qur'anic recitation accuracy and phonetic articulation

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that intercultural communication strategies, when implemented through culturally grounded educational practices, can play a pivotal role in sustaining and reinforcing Indonesian identity among children of migrant workers in Malaysia. At Sanggar Bimbingan Puchong Perdana (SBPP), specific practices—such as storytelling rooted in Indonesian folklore, singing of national songs, and the use of Bahasa Indonesia in teaching—have proven effective not only in preserving cultural memory but also in fostering emotional attachment to Indonesia.

These practices are not merely symbolic; they serve as functional tools of identity formation that provide children with consistent exposure to their cultural roots amidst a foreign environment. The integration of Pancasila-based character education, language reinforcement, and communal cultural rituals within SBPP's learning model represents a practical application

of intercultural communication theories, adapted to the lived realities of transnational children. What makes these practices especially significant is their transformative potential. Through everyday educational interactions, children are not only reminded of who they are, but are also encouraged to develop a positive sense of national belonging—despite the absence of physical proximity to Indonesia. This subtle, yet sustained, identity reinforcement lays the groundwork for a deeper connection to the homeland.

Looking ahead, such practices offer more than cultural preservation; they open pathways for future return and contribution. Children who are nurtured with strong cultural foundations may grow into individuals who carry not only the knowledge gained abroad, but also a deep sense of purpose to serve their country of origin. Thus, these intercultural strategies can be seen as investments in human capital, cultivating a generation of globally literate Indonesians with a resilient national identity and a readiness to give back.

In essence, the study highlights that intercultural communication is most effective when translated into context-sensitive educational practices, grounded in emotion, language, and cultural continuity. To sustain this impact, further institutional support, curriculum development, and community involvement are needed—ensuring that wherever Indonesian children may live, their roots remain intact, and their future remains connected to Indonesia.

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