

# EMBEDDING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES ACROSS DISCIPLINES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES



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Aprilia Cahyani Prabudiantoro Putri, Robertus Robert**

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- Chapter XXIV The Implications of Richard Rorty's Ironic Liberal Viewpoint on Education  
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## FOREWORD

Dear readers,

I am pleased to present this book, *Embedding Intercultural Competencies Across Disciplines in Social Sciences*, which reflects the collective work and academic engagement of scholars from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ), together with contributors from various disciplines. This book is part of our ongoing effort to respond to the increasingly interconnected and multicultural realities that we encounter today.

We are living in a time where interactions across cultures are becoming more frequent, shaped by globalization and rapid technological developments. These changes bring both opportunities and challenges. In this context, intercultural competence is no longer simply an additional skill, but an important capacity that helps us understand differences, work across perspectives, and engage more thoughtfully in diverse social environments.

As the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, I have the opportunity to observe how academic ideas and discussions continue to develop among our lecturers, researchers, and students. This book brings together a range of perspectives from fields including communication studies, education, history, law, environmental studies, religious education, and civic studies. Each chapter offers its own way of looking at how intercultural competencies can be understood and integrated within the social sciences.

The themes discussed in this book, such as digitalization, artificial intelligence, hybrid identities, environmental sustainability, religious moderation, and the experiences of Generation Z, reflect the changes taking place in our society today. At the same time, they show how the social sciences can help us better understand these changes and respond to them in more grounded and responsible ways.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the editors and all contributing authors for their time, commitment, and thoughtful

contributions. Their work shows a shared commitment to advancing knowledge and strengthening academic collaboration. It is my hope that this book will be useful for academics, researchers, students, and practitioners. More than that, I hope it can encourage further discussion on how intercultural perspectives can be meaningfully integrated into teaching, research, and community engagement.

Happy reading, and may this book contribute, in its own way, to building a more inclusive and understanding society.

Jakarta, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026

Yours faithfully,

**Firdaus Wajdi, Ph.D.**

*Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law  
The State University of Jakarta*

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## CHAPTER I

# FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE ACROSS SOCIAL SCIENCE DISCIPLINES: A FRAMEWORK FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

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### **A. The Imperative of Intercultural Competence in Education**

In a rapidly globalizing world, the demand for individuals who can communicate and collaborate effectively across cultures has grown more critical than ever. Higher education institutions are increasingly tasked with equipping students not only with disciplinary expertise but also with the intercultural competence necessary to navigate diverse social and professional contexts. Intercultural competence is more than just a soft skill, it is a crucial framework for understanding differences, mediating meaning, and building inclusive environments. It involves the ability to interpret behaviors through a cultural lens, adjust communication styles according to context, and foster collaboration without defaulting to ethnocentric assumptions. As students enter multicultural workplaces, engage in global research, or even interact in digital transnational spaces, their success depends not only on what they know but on how effectively they can engage with diverse cultural settings.

In the context of Indonesian higher education, the integration of intercultural competence is especially significant. As a nation with over 17,000 islands, hundreds of ethnic groups, and growing

international partnerships, Indonesia is both locally diverse and globally connected. For Indonesian students, learning how to engage across cultural differences begins at home and expands through exposure to global perspectives. In universities, intercultural competence empowers them to understand their identity in relation to others, navigate complex multicultural dynamics, and critically engage with international discourses. Within this educational landscape, intercultural learning is not just about tolerance or politeness, but it is about developing the skills to work meaningfully across worldviews and systems of thought. It helps shape future leaders who are aware, adaptable, and able to contribute responsibly to both national and international communities.

Embedding intercultural competence in education means moving beyond traditional content delivery toward a more inclusive and context-sensitive pedagogy. It requires instructors to design learning experiences that reflect cultural complexity and encourage students to reflect on their own cultural assumptions. The social sciences, with their focus on people, institutions, and meaning-making, are particularly well-suited for this transformation. In these fields, cultural context influences not only how knowledge is produced, but how it is interpreted and applied. Students in sociology, communication, anthropology, or political science must learn how different cultures shape social structures, norms, values, and epistemologies. By centering intercultural understanding within these disciplines, educators lay the groundwork for analytical thinking that is globally informed, locally grounded, and ethically engaged.

## **B. The Context and Application of Intercultural Competence in Social Sciences**

One of the most powerful applications of intercultural competence in social sciences lies in the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems. Historically marginalized, these systems offer rich, context-specific insights that challenge the dominance of Western academic traditions. Integrating indigenous perspectives into social science curricula not only broadens intellectual horizons but also affirms the cultural identities of students and communities.

This approach nurtures humility and respect, reminding students that knowledge is not the sole property of formal institutions but also resides in oral traditions, community practices, and intergenerational wisdom. For Indonesian universities, which are situated in a culturally diverse nation with a deep well of indigenous knowledge, this integration is both a responsibility and an opportunity. It allows academia to reflect the realities of the society it seeks to understand and serve.

Moreover, intercultural competence in the social sciences promotes the ability to examine one's own position, biases, and assumptions. As students engage with unfamiliar cultural concepts, they are challenged to reconsider what they have taken for granted. This process fosters deeper critical thinking and prepares students to approach social issues with greater empathy and insight. In a classroom infused with intercultural dialogue, students learn not only about others, but also about themselves. They gain a clearer understanding of how their cultural background shapes their perceptions, values, and responses. Such awareness is essential for any discipline concerned with justice, equality, and the complexities of human interaction. Thus, intercultural competence becomes a transformative force, shaping not only academic inquiry but also personal development.

### **C. Strategies for Integration through Curriculum and Collaboration**

To effectively cultivate intercultural competence in the social sciences, universities must implement strategic approaches that make intercultural learning an integral part of students' academic journeys. One widely adopted method is the infusion model, which involves incorporating intercultural themes, case studies, and learning outcomes directly into existing courses. This model avoids compartmentalizing intercultural education into isolated subjects and instead promotes a seamless integration across disciplines. For example, a sociology course might compare family structures across cultures, while a communication class could analyze media representations from various countries. Through this integration, students encounter cultural diversity as a consistent and essential aspect of their learning, rather than a separate or optional topic.

In addition to curriculum design, collaborative learning activities offer meaningful opportunities for students to engage with different cultural perspectives. Group assignments that pair local and international students encourage dialogue, negotiation, and shared problem-solving. These interactions foster not only academic growth but also interpersonal skills that are crucial in multicultural environments. Virtual exchange programs with partner universities abroad, where students work together on joint projects or discussions, further expand their intercultural exposure. These collaborative formats create a learning environment where differences are not obstacles, rather, they are sources for insight and innovation. As students learn to navigate and appreciate diversity, they develop communication strategies that are both respectful and effective across cultural lines.

Experiential learning is another powerful tool for building intercultural competence. Service-learning projects in diverse communities allow students to apply their academic knowledge while immersing themselves in unfamiliar cultural contexts. Whether through community engagement in Indonesia's rural areas or participation in cross-cultural research initiatives, these experiences challenge students to move beyond theoretical understanding and engage directly with social realities. By confronting real-world complexity, they develop practical skills in empathy, adaptability, and critical reflection. When such learning is guided and debriefed properly, it leads to lasting changes in how students view themselves, others, and the interconnected world they live in. Ultimately, experiential and collaborative learning solidify the foundation laid by classroom instruction, creating a comprehensive pathway to intercultural competence.

#### **D. Equipping Educators: Faculty Development and Institutional Support**

Intercultural competence cannot be effectively cultivated in students unless educators themselves possess the relevant skills, knowledge, and confidence to teach within diverse cultural contexts. Therefore, faculty development is an indispensable foundation for any institution-wide effort to internationalize curricula and learning

environments. It is not enough to simply expect instructors to “figure it out”. Institutions must proactively create structures that foster ongoing learning and support around intercultural teaching.

One proven approach is the establishment of intercultural mentoring programs. Pairing faculty members who have extensive international experience with those new to multicultural classrooms encourages the exchange of practical strategies, pedagogical insights, and personal reflections. These mentoring relationships build a community of practice that demystifies intercultural education while providing tailored advice for discipline-specific challenges.

Beyond mentoring, teaching clinics offer concentrated opportunities to develop essential skills, such as facilitating intercultural dialogue, managing culturally diverse classroom dynamics, and addressing microaggressions or cultural biases when they arise. These clinics should be interactive and scenario-based, allowing faculty to practice and reflect on real-world classroom situations.

Moreover, the creation and dissemination of resources and teaching materials tailored to each discipline are crucial. Social sciences, by their nature, engage with culture, power, identity, and social structures, yet pedagogy must be adapted to the epistemological frameworks and methodologies particular to fields such as sociology, political science, anthropology, and economics. Investment in such resources signals that intercultural competence is not a mere add-on but integral to disciplinary excellence.

Ultimately, a robust faculty development ecosystem grounded in mentorship, workshops, and resource availability sends a powerful institutional message: intercultural competence is a valued, core academic competency. This investment lays the groundwork for transformative teaching and, by extension, transformative learning for students preparing to enter an interconnected world.

### **E. Navigating Communication Styles: Theory into Practice**

Effectively engaging across cultures begins with an informed understanding of how communication styles differ and how cultural patterns influence perception and interaction. Geertz Hofstede’s seminal framework of the five dimensions of national culture offers a

practical lens for educators and students to appreciate these differences without resorting to stereotypes.

For instance, power distance explains how hierarchical or egalitarian orientations shape expectations about authority and decision-making. In high power distance cultures, deference to authority is normative, while in low power distance cultures, more egalitarian dialogue is expected. Awareness of these patterns can improve classroom interactions and collaborative research partnerships.

Similarly, uncertainty avoidance reflects the degree to which societies tolerate ambiguity or seek clear rules and procedures. This has implications for how different cultures respond to novel ideas or open-ended discussion formats—a pivotal consideration for seminar design in social sciences.

The continuum of individualism versus collectivism informs how people value personal autonomy relative to group harmony and interconnectedness. Recognizing this helps faculty mediate classroom participation and team projects, encouraging a balance between individual expression and collaborative cohesion.

Adding to Hofstede, Edward T. Hall's concept of high-context vs. low-context communication enriches intercultural awareness. In high-context cultures, much meaning is embedded in nonverbal cues, relationships, and situational context. Conversely, low-context cultures prefer explicit, direct language where meaning is contained in words, leaving less room for interpretation. Miscommunication often occurs when interlocutors from these differing contexts fail to recognize each other's communication norms.

The scenarios presented involving gift-giving and academic meeting norms between American and Indonesian colleagues illustrate these dynamics poignantly. For example, the American expectation of openly expressing gratitude upon receiving a gift contrasts with the Indonesian preference for more private, deferential appreciation—a divergence rooted in cultural norms around face-saving and relational harmony.

We must be reminded that these cultural dimensions function more as a continuum, rather than mutually exclusive categories. For example, most cultural groups fall somewhere in between when it

comes to communication styles. Some might prefer one over the other, but variations exist in cultural groups, as these groups are inherently culturally diverse. More importantly, context dictates preferences for one style over another. For example, in a public setting, a person might prefer to be indirect when communicating. Yet, in private, the same person could be very direct with their intimates.

Navigating such intercultural encounters successfully requires empathy, curiosity, and adaptability. Educators should use these frameworks not as rigid cultural checklists but as starting points for dialogue that honors individual differences and finds bridges between diverse communication styles. Embedding these insights into social science curricula prepares students to interpret and mediate complex global interactions thoughtfully.

#### **F. A Call to Action: Building Toward Institutional Intercultural Capacity**

Developing intercultural competence transcends the responsibility of well-meaning individual educators or students alone; it demands bold, institution-wide commitment. Universities must allocate resources such as time, funding, and administrative support to embed global and intercultural perspectives deeply into teaching, research, and service missions.

For Indonesian institutions and other culturally rich yet globally underrepresented contexts, this moment offers a unique opportunity. Rather than simply adopting Western-centric models of higher education, universities can lead by highlighting their indigenous knowledge systems, unique social experiences, and linguistic diversity. This pluralistic approach enriches global social sciences by incorporating multiple ways of knowing and being, aligning with movements toward decolonizing knowledge.

Institutions should foster environments where students and faculty from diverse backgrounds engage in sustained intercultural dialogue, collaborative projects, and community involvement that deepen practical intercultural skills. Metrics of success can include not only academic outputs but also demonstrated growth in open-mindedness, cultural empathy, and cross-cultural problem-solving.

Most importantly, intercultural competence is neither innate nor static, it is a dynamic skill developed through deliberate practice, reflection, and supportive mentorship over time. By intentionally embedding intercultural learning outcomes within curricular and co-curricular activities across multiple social science disciplines, universities prepare graduates to become thoughtful, ethical professionals equipped to navigate and shape an interconnected world thoughtfully and respectfully.

The time for action is now. Together, through intentional curricular design, faculty cultivation, and institutional resolve, intercultural understanding can evolve from aspiration to lived reality. This comprehensive approach promises to nurture a generation of social scientists, as well as informed citizens who do not merely observe cultural differences but actively engage with them to foster equity, inclusion, and sustainable global citizenship.

## **G. Conclusion**

In the evolving landscape of global education, embedding intercultural competence into the social sciences is no longer a mere enhancement—it is a necessity. As societies become more interconnected and culturally diverse, students must be equipped not only with disciplinary expertise but also with the ability to interpret, adapt, and thrive across cultural boundaries. This chapter has illustrated how intercultural competence can be fostered through curriculum infusion, experiential learning, collaborative projects, and faculty development. These strategies ensure that intercultural skills are woven into a holistic academic experience, rather than treated as peripheral or supplemental.

By addressing cultural patterns in communication, valuing indigenous knowledge systems, and embracing pluralistic approaches to learning, institutions help shape graduates who are empathetic, reflective, and globally competent. The commitment to intercultural development must be holistic and institutional, rooted in policy, sustained by faculty engagement, and enriched by student participation. With intentional efforts, universities can become spaces where diversity is not only acknowledged but celebrated; where dialogue replaces misunderstanding; and where students are prepared not just to work in the world, but to help transform it for the better.

In the end, fostering intercultural competence is about more than professional readiness, it is about nurturing global citizens who are capable of building bridges across difference, advocating for inclusive societies, and leading with cultural humility. This is the future of education, and it begins with the choices we make in our classrooms today.

## H. Reference

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