

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN LOCAL AND NON-LOCAL PLAYERS ON THE CIREBON UNITED SOCCER TEAM

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Abstract

The diversity of cultural backgrounds within a multicultural soccer team has the potential to influence communication patterns, cohesion, and the effectiveness of cooperation among players. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of intercultural communication within the Cirebon United soccer team composed of players native to Cirebon United and players from outside the region using the cultural intelligence (CQ) framework. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, utilizing participatory observation and in depth interviews with local players, players from outside the region, and the coach. Data were analyzed thematically based on the four dimensions of CQ: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. The results indicate that differences in regional language and accents during the initial stages of interaction have the potential to cause misunderstandings, however, these did not escalate into conflicts because they were managed through clarification of meaning, the use of Indonesian as a common language in formal contexts, and the strengthening of informal interactions that fostered emotional closeness. The four dimensions of CQ operate simultaneously during training, matches, and social interactions, thereby forming adaptive communication patterns that support team cohesion and performance stability. This study contributes to the fields of sports communication by demonstrating that cultural intelligence functions not only as an individual competency but also as an integrative mechanism that shapes the effectiveness of collective communication within a multicultural regional level soccer team.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication; Cultural Intelligence; Soccer Team; Cultural Diversity; Team Cohesion;

INTRODUCTION

Soccer is a sport that involves not only physical and technical aspects of the game, but also social aspects, particularly interactions among team members. A soccer team is made up of players with different cultural backgrounds, personalities, and communication styles. This makes communication and interaction within the team key factors in fostering good teamwork, cohesion, and success in matches. According to (Wicaksono et al., 2021) From a communication perspective, culture and communication are interconnected and mutually influential. Indonesia is well known for its unique cultural diversity, each with its own distinct characteristics. Therefore, intercultural communication is crucial in teams whose members come from different regions. One regional soccer club worth examining in this context is Cirebon United. Cirebon United is a soccer club that competes in the West Java Liga 4 and is active in developing young players in Cirebon. The club not only provides opportunities for local players but also recruits players from outside the region, including from as far away as Papua and Medan.

Based in Cirebon, West Java, the club focuses on developing local soccer through its youth development programs such as the Soccer School, Academy, and Performance units which provide a platform for young players to develop physically in various Top Skor Cirebon League for the U 15 and U 17 age groups, as well as the Yooscout, where the team has demonstrated competitive performance amidst a diverse group of players from various regions. The cultural diversity within the team creates a unique dynamic in communication. These differences in communication styles, customs, languages, and ways of interacting require a smooth adaptation process to ensure harmonious relationships among players and prevent social divides within the team (Nadhilah & Prasetya; Wibawa, 2024). In reality, cultural adaptation within a team does not always go smoothly. Differences in language, interaction styles, and group values can create communication barriers. Previous research has shown that new players typically need time to understand group norms and build emotional closeness with other team members (Kurniawan, 2021).

If this process does not go well, game coordination and teamwork can be disrupted. Therefore, based on the researcher's discussion, the research question in this study is: How does the process of intercultural communication between local and non local players occur within the Cirebon United soccer team, and how do the players cultural adaptations contribute to building team cohesion and identity. To date, similar studies on intercultural communication in the context of sports have primarily focused on interactions between coaches and players or on cultural adaptation strategies in academic and organizational settings. Consequently, the researchers identified an untapped area for further research: the aspect of intercultural communication among players within a local soccer team characterized by high cultural diversity, such as Cirebon United. Therefore, the researcher believes that examining the interactions between local and non local players in building team cohesion and identity within a regional sports team is crucial for further study. This research aims to explain how non-local players develop their skills, understand the new team culture, adjust their behavior, and maintain motivation for positive interaction. Consequently, this study is important because it aims to analyze how intercultural communication occurs at Cirebon united , how non local players adapt to the team culture, and how Cirebon united fosters team cohesion

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication

Communication can be understood as a dynamic process in which information such as messages, ideas, or concepts is conveyed from one individual or group to another, resulting in mutual understanding and influence among the parties involved. This process involves not only the transfer of data but also the creation of shared meaning and interpretation. In most contexts, communication occurs through verbal means, including spoken and written language however, communication can also be supported by nonverbal cues that enhance the effectiveness and clarity of the message being conveyed (Nurkadri et al., 2024)

Communication is an important aspect of human life. Communication allows individuals to interact and connect with one another in various situations whether at home, at work, or in social settings. Without effective communication, daily activities and relationships can easily become disorganized or chaotic (Alfarizi et al., 2018) According to J.A. Devito in Studies (2021), communication is defined as an act by one or more people who send and receive messages that are distorted by interference occurring within a specific context, have a specific impact, and provide an opportunity for feedback.

The meaning of communication is, first, that it involves the exchange of symbols; second, that there is a shared understanding between the sender and the receiver; communication is oriented toward this shared understanding between the sender and the receiver. (Suherman;Ansar, n.d.) According to Courtland L. Boove and John V. Thill in (et al., 2023) communication can be understood as a dynamic process involving the exchange of messages between individuals or groups. Communication is not merely the transmission of information, but also its interpretation and understanding, ensuring that the intended meaning is conveyed effectively.

According to Wilbur Scramm and Harold D. Laswell (as cited in Nur, 2022), communication can be considered effective when the message conveyed by the communicator aligns with the recipient's frame of reference that is, their background, experience, knowledge, and shared interpretations developed through interaction. In other words, successful communication occurs when both parties share a common understanding that allows the message to be accurately interpreted based on shared meanings and experiences.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is a form of communication that occurs when individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds interact with one another to build mutual understanding. They communicate and interpret messages. According to Liliweri (2021) in his book *Intercultural Communication: Definitions and Models*, intercultural communication is understood as a process of interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, in which differences in values, customs, and interpretive systems influence how messages are interpreted and mutually understood.

Gudykunst and Kim (2017) note that intercultural communication involves efforts to reduce uncertainty and anxiety in interactions between individuals from different cultures. When two cultures interact, misunderstandings may arise due to differences in perceptions of symbols, language, or social context. In such situations, individuals are required to possess cultural awareness so they can adapt their communication style to the other person background. Intercultural communication takes place in situations where individuals come from different cultural backgrounds, and this diversity essentially makes communication a crucial element in fostering social integration. Therefore, societies with diverse cultural backgrounds need to be able to manage messages effectively and foster positive

perceptions. This aims to maintain harmonious relationships among parties with cultural differences (Milyane et al., as cited in Adde, 2025) Furthermore, According to (Zhang, 2021), the success of intercultural communication is greatly influenced by an individual's ability to understand cultural differences, master cross-cultural skills, and demonstrate empathy in interactions. (Wicaksono et al., 2021) The ethnic and cultural diversity in Indonesia is incredibly varied. Culture encompasses everything shared by a community. Culture consists of customs that embody important values passed down from generation to generation. This heritage must be preserved to prevent it from fading or disappearing so that it can be sustained by future generations

In the case of Cirebon united, cultural diversity among players is actually an asset that enriches the team dynamics. However, without effective communication, that diversity can become a source of conflict. Therefore, this study focuses on how players from different cultural backgrounds build mutual understanding, adapt, and foster social cohesion within the team

Soccer Team

Soccer is a team sport played by two teams with the goal of scoring as many goals as possible in the opponent's net within a set time limit. Soccer is a global sport governed by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), which ensures uniform rules and competition organization worldwide and facilitates the sport's development in various countries (Liputan 6, 2024). Soccer is not only played as a competitive sport but is also an integral part of people social and cultural lives, where cooperation, team strategy, and communication among players are key elements of performance on the field.

(Bryan & Loisa, 2023) states that soccer is not just about technical skills, but also requires teamwork, cooperation, and effective communication among players to achieve optimal performance.

Soccer club like Manchester united and Barcelona demonstrate that cultural diversity within a team can be a major strength when managed effectively. Player from various countries bring different playing styles, work ethics, and cultural expressions, yet they are still able to create harmony through cross cultural communication and understanding. A similar phenomenon is also evident at the local level, such as with Cirebon united, a club based in the city of Cirebon united that competes in league 4 indonesia. This club serves as a platform for players from various regions including papua, sumbawa, medan and west java to interact, train and compete together.

This team focuses not only on athletic achievements but also on character building and solidarity among players. During training and competitions, the coach serves as a facilitator of communication, while the players must be able to navigate differences in language, speaking styles, and social norms in order to work well together. This situation makes Cirebon united a microcosm of a multicultural society within the world of Indonesian sports.

Intercultural Communication in the Context of a Soccer Team

Intercultural communication in the context of a soccer team is the process of exchanging messages and meanings among individual from different cultural backgrounds, with the goal of building mutual understandings and fostering effective cooperation within the team. According to Gudykunst and Kim (2017), intercultural communication requires individuals to adapt to differences in language, values, and interaction styles in order to create harmonious social relationship. In a sports environment, cross cultural interactions are often unavoidable because teams generally consist of players from various regions or even countries.

In the context of soccer teams in Indonesia such as Cirebon united cultural diversity is a key element that can enrich team dynamics. Liliwery(2019) explains that cultural diversity within a group can have two sides: it can serve as a potential source of creativity and team solidarity, but it can also be a source of misunderstandings if communication breaks down. Differences in regional languages, communication styles, and the social values that each players brings often pose their own challenges during the adaptation process

Hall (1976), in his theory of High-Context and Low-Context Cultures, asserts that the way individuals interpret messages is influenced by their cultural background. High-context cultures, such as those common in Indonesia, rely more heavily on implied meanings, nonverbal expressions, and social situations. This means that understanding messages in multicultural sports team interactions must take into account the social and emotional context, rather than merely the literal meaning.

In this adaptation process, the theory of Cultural Intelligence proposed by Earley and Ang (2015) becomes relevant. This theory explains an individual's ability to understand, learn, and adapt their behavior when interacting with people from different cultures. In a soccer team, cultural intelligence helps players understand their teammates' norms, customs, and communication patterns so they can build effective cooperation. Intercultural communication within a soccer team can be understood as a social mechanism that enables team members from different backgrounds

to adapt, build coordination, and create a cohesive group identity. An understanding of this theory serves as an important foundation for exploring how interactions between local and non-local players take place.

The Theory of Cultural Intelligence – Earley & Ang (2015)

The theory of cultural intelligence explains how individuals are able to adapt to social situations involving cultural differences. Earley and Ang (2015) note that cultural intelligence consists of four main aspects. First, the metacognitive aspect, which is an individual's awareness that they are interacting with a different culture and therefore need to devise appropriate strategies when communicating. Second, the cognitive aspect, which is an individual's understanding of the values, norms, customs, and communication patterns of another culture. Third, the motivational aspect, which is an individual's willingness to engage and adapt in cross-cultural interactions. Fourth, the behavioral aspect, which is an individual's ability to adjust both verbal and nonverbal expressions to align with the local culture. In the context of Cirebon United, players from outside the region specifically from Papua and Sumbawa need to possess cultural intelligence so they can understand their teammates' communication styles, respect the team's structure, and adapt their playing style to align with the team's rhythm.

There have been several similar studies on intercultural communication, including a study by Kurniawan (2021) who found that soccer players from outside the local area face a fairly complex adjustment process, particularly in terms of conversational language, communication styles and social norms within the team.

A study conducted by (Lutfiana & Suryawati, 2025), explored the patterns of interpersonal communication between coaches and athletes on a basketball team, demonstrating how coaches' communication helps strengthen relationships and enhance team collaboration. This study is relevant for supporting the argument regarding the role of communication in sports team dynamics. Putra (2018) in his research on communication patterns among soccer coaches, he found that the success of building teamwork is greatly influenced by the communication strategies employed by the coach. Persuasive and supportive interpersonal communication helps create a conducive team environment, making it easier for players to coordinate and align their game strategies. This demonstrates that communication is not merely a supporting aspect, but a fundamental element in the dynamics of a sports team.

(Nadhilah & Prasetya; Wibawa, 2024) explains that nonverbal communication such as body movements, eye contact, facial expressions, and spatial relationships (proxemics) plays a strategic role in fostering coordination and cooperation in team sports. In fast-paced, high-pressure game situations, nonverbal communication serves as a vital means of conveying messages effectively without the need for lengthy verbal instructions.

Research conducted by (Firdaus et al., 2025), stated that communication practices within the context of local culture play a vital role in preserving, promoting, and transforming cultural values in society. These findings are relevant to this study because they demonstrate how cultural symbols and communication strategies can be mutually understood within a multicultural community such as Cirebon United.

These previous studies indicate that research on communication within sports teams has been conducted, but there has not been much research specifically examining intercultural communication between local and non local players in the context of a semi-professional soccer team such as Cirebon United. Therefore, this study fills that gap by examining how the process of intercultural communication takes place, how cultural adaptation occurs, and how group dynamics support or hinder player integration.

Cultural Foundation

Culture is a system of meanings that shapes the way individuals think, behave and communicate in social life. According to Koentjaningrat (2015) culture encompasses ideas, values, norms, and patterns of behavior that are learned and passed down from one generation to the next. Culture not only shapes an individuals identity but also influences how a person understands messages, expresses emotions, and forms social relationships with others.

In the context of communication, culture serves as a frame of reference that determines the meaning of symbols and messages. Hall (2016) states that differences in cultural backgrounds can lead to differences in language use, intonation, nonverbal expressions, and ways of expressing opinions. Therefore, when individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact, the potential for differences in perception and misunderstandings increases.

Cultural context is important in this study because the Cirebon United Soccer Team consists of players from diverse cultural backgrounds, such as local players from Cirebon as well as players from outside the region, including Papua and Medan. Each cultural group brings different values, customs, and communication styles to the team environment. Local Cirebon players tend to use the local dialect and a relaxed communication style

This cultural diversity makes the soccer team a space for intense cross-cultural interaction, both on and off the field. Therefore, an understanding of cultural foundations is necessary to explain how the process of intercultural communication takes place, how players from outside the region adapt to the team's culture, and how cultural differences can influence group dynamics and teamwork. In this study, cultural foundations serve as the basis for analyzing interactions among players, understanding the process of cultural adaptations, and examining the role of intercultural communication in shaping the cohesion and identity of the Cirebon united soccer team.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach because it seeks to understand the experiences, interactions process, and meanings of intercultural communication that occur in the daily lives of players within Cirebon United Team. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore social reality in depth through the perspectives of informants who are directly involved in the phenomenon. Through this approach, the researcher can understand how the players build a shared understanding, negotiate identities, and adapt their communication styles within a team composed of members from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study places greater emphasis on exploring the meanings and interpretations of communicative behaviors among individuals rather than on measuring specific numerical data or variables.

This study was conducted with the Cirebon United Soccer Team, located in the city of Cirebon, West Java. This location was deliberately chosen because it brings together players from the local Cirebon culture with players from outside the region such as Papua, Sumbawa, and Medan, thereby creating a genuine environment for cross-cultural interactions. This cultural diversity makes the team a space rich with processes of cultural negotiation, adjustment in communication styles, and the building of solidarity through training sessions, matches, and daily activities off the field. The primary focus of the study is to understand how intercultural communication unfolds between local players and those from outside the region, and how the process of cultural adaptation takes place.

The data used in this study are qualitative data sourced from both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with local players, out-of-town players, coaches, and team staff involved in the communication process. In addition, the researcher conducted direct observations of training activities, player interactions during game strategy planning, and informal communication that took place outside of training hours. Documentation in the form of photos of activities, recordings of conversations (with the informants' permission), and player profiles was used to supplement and enrich the observational and interview data. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from theoretical books, scientific journals, research articles, and other literature sources related to intercultural communication, cultural adaptation, cultural intelligence, and group dynamics in the context of sports.

Data analysis in this study utilized the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which consists of three stages that occur continuously. The first stage is data reduction, which is the process of selecting, focusing, and organizing data relevant to the research focus. The second stage is data presentation, in which the categorized data are organized into narrative descriptions to help the researcher identify emerging patterns, relationships, and trends. The final stage is drawing conclusions, which is the process of interpreting the meaning of the analyzed data to answer the research questions and achieve the research result. Data validity in this study is maintained through several validation techniques commonly used in qualitative research. Data validation is necessary to ensure that the research findings truly reflect the conditions observed in the field and are scientifically sound.

The primary technique used was source triangulation, which involves comparing and cross-checking information obtained from various informants, such as local players, players from outside the region, coaches, and management of the Cirebon United Soccer Team. By comparing the perspectives of various parties, the researcher was able to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the intercultural communication processes occurring within the team. In addition to source triangulation, this study also employed methodological triangulation, which involves comparing data from interviews, direct observations during training sessions and matches, and photographic documentation. The use of these various data collection techniques aims to reduce bias and enhance the reliability of the research findings.

The researcher also employed member checking, which involves reconfirming the interview results or preliminary findings with the informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations align with the informants' intentions and experiences. This step is crucial to ensure that the data collected does not deviate from the reality experienced by the research subjects. By applying triangulation and member check techniques, it is hoped that the data obtained in this study will possess a high level of credibility, reliability, and validity, thereby enabling the

research findings to serve as a valid scientific reference in the study of intercultural communication within the context of a soccer team.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, obtained through field observations and in depth interviews with local cirebon players, players from medan, and the head coach of cirebon united, indicate that intercultural communication within the team evolves through a continuous and collaborative adaptation process, to interpret these findings, the study applies the cultural intelligence (CQ) frame work proposed by Earley and Ang (2015) which consist of four interrelated dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational. And behavioral. These dimensions illustrate how team members become aware of cultural differences, develop an understandings of one anothers communication patterns , maintain the motivation to adapt, and modify their communication behaviors to suit different interactional contexts

The team composition featuring local players with the characteristic communication style of the Javanese coast, which tends to prioritize harmony, alongside players from outside the region with a more direct and assertive communication style creates intense dynamics of cross-cultural interaction. These differences are evident in everyday conversations, practices, and even matches that demand quick coordination and precise understanding. In the early stages, differences in accents and speking styles had the potential to cause misunderstandings. However through repeated formal and informal interactions, the players gradually build a shared understandings and adapt their communication style. Consequently, intercultural communication in cirebon united emerges not as an immediate outcome but as an ongoing process of negotiating shared meanings and developing inclusive communication practices that ultimately contribute to stronger team cohesion and improved collective performance.

The Dynamics of Adaptation Among Non-Local Players in the Process of Intercultural Communication

The results of observations and interviews show that the intercultural communication process experienced by non local player has developed significantly from the time they first joined until approximately one month after becoming part of cirebon united. In the early stages, non local players were still adjusting to the team social environment. Differences in regional languages, accent, communication styles, and daily habits meant that communication was not yet optimal. In some situations, players from outside the region still felt confused when hearing conversations in the cirebon language, so they more often observed, asked questions, or waited for explanations from teammates before responding. This situation indicates that, in the early stages, the communication process was still dominated by efforts to understand the new cultural environment before they were able to actively participate in interactions.

After about a month of joining the team, research findings showed a fairly noticeable change in the communication patterns of players from outside the region. The intensity of joint training sessions, matches, and informal interactions in the dormitory provided players with opportunities to recognize their teammates communication style, understand the meanings of frequently used local terms, and adjust their speech to make themselves more easily understood. These changes are evident not only in improved communication fluency but also in the growing confidence players demonstrate when expressing oponions, joking around, and coordinating during matches. Cosequently, cross cultural communication has evolved from a process of individual adjusment toward more harmonious and equal interpersonal relationship

These changes indicate that the process of cultural adaptation within Cirebon United occurs gradually through continuous interaction. Although players from outside the region maintain their original cultural identities, they begin to adopt communication habits that have developed within the team environment, such as using Indonesian as the primary language in formal contexts, adjusting their speaking intonation, and understanding the communication style characteristic of local players. On the other hand, local players also demonstrate an open attitude by reducing their use of regional dialects when communicating in

situations involving the entire team. This situation illustrates the occurrence of communicative acculturation a process of mutual adjustment without losing one cultural identity.

Furthermore, the research findings show that repeated cross cultural communication not only fosters individuals ability to adapt but also shapes a team communication culture. This culture is characterized by shared communication norms accepted by all team members, such as the use of a mutually understandable language, openness to seeking clarification when misunderstandings arise, and the practice of building relationship through off site activities. These findings suggest that cultural diversity does not end with the process of individual adaptation alone, but evolves into a collective strenght that reinforces social cohesion, the effectiveness of game coordination, and the stablility of the team overall performance.

Aspect	Upon Joining	After ±1 Month	Output
Language	Lacking the Understanding of the Cirebon dialect yet	Start learning and using the Indonesian language	More effective communication
Interaction	Tends to be passive	Be more active in interacting	The relationship is growing closer
Practice	Coordination is not yet optimal	Coordination is smoother	Cooperation is increasing
Matches	Communication is still limited	Faster and more effective communication	The team's performance is better
Attitude	Adjusting to a new environment	Adjusting the way they speak and joke around	Successful communication adaptation
Cultural Relations	Still in the process of adjustment	Mutual understanding of cultural differences	Terbentuk budaya komunikasi tim

Dimension	Findings
Metacognitive	Recognizing cultural differences.
Cognitive	Understanding your teammates' communication styles and personalities.
Motivational	Have the willingness to adapt.
Behavioral	Adapting communication behaviors within the team.

Awareness of Cultural Differences in Interactions

The metacognitive dimensions refers to an individual awareness that they are in a cross cultural situation and need to reflectively adjust their communication strategies. In the context of this study, this awareness is evident when local players recognize differencess in regional languages and choose to clarify meaning to avoid misunderstandings.

One of the players from Cirebon said:

“if someone speaks the local dialect and i dont understand, i usually ask what it means so there wont be any misunderstandings” (Informant I, Noel 2026)

This statement indicates the presence of cognitive monitoring and evaluation processes during interaction. Individual do not immediately interpret messages based on personal assumptions, but seek clarifications

These findings align with a study (Bryan & Loisa, 2023) published in the Kiwari Journal, which states that reflective and open interpersonal communication within sports teams helps reduce miscommunication and improve team coordination. In the context of Cirebon United, this awareness is also evident in the coach's policy requiring the use of Indonesian during practices and matches. This strategy is a form of communication regulation designed to reduce potential ambiguities in meaning resulting from differences in regional languages.

Understanding the Values and Communication Patterns of Other Cultures

The cognitive dimensions relates to an individual knowledge of the norms, customs, and communication patterns of other cultures. In the early stages of joining the team, players from outside the region reported feeling confused due to differences in accents and communication styles.

Players from outside the region stated:

“at firts i was a little confused by the accent, but after a while i started to understand how people here speak” (Informant II, Amri 2026)

This process demonstrates that cultural knowledge is not acquired intantly, but rather develops through repeated interactions. Over time, the players begin to understand that a loud tone of voice is not an expressions pf anger, but rather a characteristic of a specific cultural communication style.

This finding is supported by (Fauzar et al., 2025) in the Spirit Scientific Journal, which states that the use of a shared language within a sports team helps build collective understanding and strengthen team identity. Thus, the cognitive dimension at Cirebon United develops through the social learning process that occurs during practice and daily interactions.

The Drive to Adapt and Build Relationships

The motivational dimension relates to an individual's willingness to engage in cross-cultural interactions and build interpersonal relationships. In this study, adaptive motivation was clearly evident in the efforts of players from outside the region who actively sought to build rapport through informal interactions.

A player from out of town said:

“To help me adjust, I often play and hang out with friends off the field.” (Informant 2, Amri 2026)

Informal interactions in the locker room play a significant role in building trust and team chemistry. Local players also noted that joking around and sharing stories about their hometowns helps them understand each other's personalities.

Research conducted by (Abinaskholani & Nurrachmad, 2024) published in the Journal of Physical Education shows that warm interpersonal communication among team members enhances achievement motivation and strengthens group solidarity. Thus, the motivational dimensions within a team is not merely individual in nature but evolves into a collective motivation to maintain team cohesion.

Adjustments in Verbal and Nonverbal Behavior

The behavioral dimensions relates to an individual ability to adjust their communication behavior in concreate ways. In this study, behavioral adjusment were evident in the use of indonesia as lingua franca in formal situation.

The coach said:

“on the field, we have to speak indonesian so that everyone can understand” (Informant 3, Zul 2026)

This policy demonstrates the existence of a structural adaptation mechanism within the team. In addition, players from outside the region are gradually adjusting their tone of voice and sense of humorso as not to create a negative impression.

Research by (Lutfiana & Suryawati, 2025) found that coaches' interpersonal communication patterns play a key role in creating a supportive and adaptive environment within sports teams.

Based on an analysis of the four dimensions described above, this study shows that the process of intercultural communication within the Cirebon United team does not occur in isolation but rather develops comprehensively and continuously through both formal and informal interactions. Formal interactions that take place during practices and matches serve as a space for structured communication, particularly in the delivery of instructions, tactical coordination, and performance evaluation. Informal interactions that take place in the locker room, during breaks or in casual activities off the field serve as social spaces that facilitate a more personal and open exchange of cultural experiences. The combination of these two types of interaction forms an adaptive communication pattern and accelerates the integration process among players from different cultural backgrounds.

The research findings also identified communication barriers during the early stages of adaptation, particularly those related to differences in regional languages, accents, and verbal expression styles. These differences have the potential to cause ambiguity of meaning and misunderstandings, especially in situations requiring quick responses, such as practices and matches. However, these barriers did not escalate into significant conflicts due to collective efforts to manage these differences. These efforts are reflected in the practice of clarifying meaning when misunderstandings arise, the agreement to use Indonesian as the primary language of communication in formal context, increased informal interactions to build emotional closeness, and the active role of coaches in creating an inclusive and coordinated communication structure. This strategy demonstrates that cultural differences are not permanent barriers, but rather challenges that can be managed through awareness and appropriate communication strategies.

Successful communication within a sports team is not determined solely by technical skills and playing ability. Social and cultural factors play an equally important role in fostering team cohesion and effective collaboration. A team's ability to recognize cultural differences, understand each other's communication styles, have the drive to build harmonious relationships, and flexibly adapt their communication behaviours forms the foundation of team solidarity. In other words, the effectiveness of collective performance depends not only on game strategy but also on the quality of interactions among individuals in managing diversity.

Conceptually, this study reinforces the relevance of the cultural intelligence approach in analyzing communication dynamics within multicultural sports teams. The context of Cirebon United, which recruits players from across regions, demonstrates that even local sports environments face cultural interaction complexities that are no less significant than those in multinational organizations. Therefore, the cultural intelligence approach is not only relevant in the context of global business and organizations but is also applicable to the management of community and region-based sports teams. Practically, the findings of this study imply that sports team management and development need to incorporate the development of cross-cultural communication competencies as an integral part of their development strategies.

The results of this study confirm that the process of intercultural communication within the Cirebon United team takes place through adaptive, gradual, and ongoing interactions between local players and players from outside the region. This communication process develops through training sessions, matches, and informal interactions that enable players to build a shared understanding of their respective differences in language, accents, communication styles. Furthermore, intercultural communication has been shown to play a crucial role in fostering team cohesion, cooperation, and collective identity by fostering more open, harmonious, and mutually supportive interpersonal relationships. This study also shows that players from outside the region engage in various forms of cultural adaptation, such as learning local communication patterns, adjusting their verbal and nonverbal behavior, and increasing social interaction as part of their efforts to adapt to the team environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings obtained from observations and in depth interviews with local cirebon players, players from outside the region, and the coach of cirebon united, this study concludes that intercultural communication within the team develops through an ongoing process of adaptation. Cultural differences, including language, accent, and communication style, are not viewed as barriers that hinder interactions. Instead, these differences encourage players to learn from one another and gradually adjust their communication patterns through daily activities such as training sessions, matches, and interactions in the team dormitory. As players become more familiar with each other's background, communication becomes more harmonious team environment

The study also indicates that intercultural communication has an important role in strengthening relationships among team members. Formal communication enables players to understand tactical instructions, coordinate their responsibilities, and perform effectively during training and competition. At the same time, informal interactions outside the field, including casual conversations, shared meals, and recreational activities, help build stronger interpersonal relationships. These everyday experiences create mutual trust, increase solidarity, and strengthen the sense of belonging within the team, all of which are essential for maintaining positive team cohesion

Another important finding is that players from outside the region actively adapt to the team social and cultural environment. Indonesia is consistently used as the common language to facilitate communication, while players gradually become familiar with different accents, expressions, and interaction styles. Initial communication challenges caused by regional differences are addressed through repeated interaction, clarification, and mutual understandings. The coach also plays an important role by encouraging open communication and ensuring that every player feels included regardless of cultural background. This supportive environment allows cultural diversity to become a source of learning rather than a source of conflict

Overall, the findings demonstrate that cultural intelligence provides a useful perspective for understanding how intercultural communication operates within a multicultural football team. The ability to recognize cultural differences, remain motivated to adapt, and modify communication behavior according to different situations enables players to work together more effectively. Consequently, developing intercultural communication competence should be considered an important aspect of team development, as it not only improves collaborations on and off the field but also transforms cultural diversity into a valuable asset that supports the team long term performance and success.

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