

The Role of Cirebonese Cultural Awareness in Enhancing English Communication among Local Students

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Abstract: This quantitative study investigates the role of cultural awareness in improving English communication across cultural boundaries, with a special focus on the local culture of Cirebon, Indonesia. A survey was conducted among ten students, in Cirebon using a structured Google Form questionnaire. This finding reveals that understanding and respecting local cultural values such as linguistic politeness, traditional customs, and regional identity significantly increases the clarity, empathy, and effectiveness of English communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating local cultural identity into English learning and shows that cultural awareness training must be embedded in cross-cultural communication curricula.

Keywords: cultural awareness, English communication, Cirebon culture, cross-cultural competence, language and culture.

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, the capacity to communicate effectively across cultures is essential, especially when using English as a global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2015). English proficiency alone does not ensure successful interaction; communicative effectiveness often depends on understanding cultural norms, values, and expectations. Cultural awareness—defined as the ability to recognize, respect, and adapt to cultural differences—thus becomes a fundamental component of cross-cultural competence (Lázár, 2019).

Culture shapes how individuals interpret messages, manage conversations, and respond to others. Misunderstandings frequently arise not from linguistic errors but from differing cultural assumptions embedded in speech acts, gestures, and interaction styles (Weninger,

2018). For instance, while direct speech may be appreciated in some Western contexts, it may be perceived as impolite in many Asian cultures. These contrasts emphasize that intercultural communication requires more than just linguistic knowledge; it demands cultural literacy and reflexivity.

As Kramsch (2014) asserts, language is a carrier of culture, and when people speak a language, they simultaneously convey a set of cultural values and worldviews. Accordingly, English language education should incorporate intercultural dimensions to foster both language proficiency and cultural empathy. This has led to a shift in language pedagogy toward the development of “intercultural speakers” (Byram & Wagner, 2018), who can navigate cultural boundaries with sensitivity and flexibility.

Despite this growing emphasis, many English education settings—particularly in regional areas such as Cirebon, Indonesia—continue to focus primarily on grammar, vocabulary, and test performance. The role of local cultural identity in shaping students' English communication remains underexplored. In a culturally diverse city like Cirebon, where Islamic, Javanese, Sundanese, and Chinese traditions converge, local values influence communicative styles, including politeness strategies, indirect speech, and expressions of respect.

This study aims to explore how awareness of Cirebonese culture contributes to students' English communication in cross-cultural contexts. Grounded in the framework of intercultural competence, the research seeks to understand how integrating local cultural values can empower learners to communicate with greater confidence, clarity, and cultural sensitivity in global settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to investigate the relationship between cultural awareness and the effectiveness of English communication across cultures, with a specific focus on Cirebon local culture. A quantitative approach was selected to allow for structured measurement of participants' awareness, perceptions, and experiences in real-life intercultural communication using English. This design also enables statistical description of trends within the population studied. As supported by Creswell and Poth (2018), quantitative methods are suitable for analyzing attitudes and behaviors across wider groups and for identifying potential patterns that can inform educational strategies.

Participants

The participants in this study were ten students from the Cirebon Prima Nation Institute. They are chosen using purposive sampling based on their experience in using English in an academic or social context that involves intercultural interaction. All participants are familiar with Cirebonese culture and have varying degrees of English exposure through classroom learning, tourism involvement, or online communication with people from different cultural backgrounds.

The sample included male and female students, with an age range between 19-24 years. Their educational background and cultural orientation provide a variety of perspectives on how local culture influences English communication across cultural contexts.

Data Collection

The data were gathered through a structured online questionnaire designed using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of ten items, including both Likert-scale statements and open-ended questions. These questions were intended to measure students' level of cultural awareness, their confidence in using English in multicultural situations, and the extent to which they integrate aspects of Cirebonese culture in their communication.

The questionnaire covered themes such as: The importance of cultural values when speaking English, Instances where Cirebon culture influenced communication, Beliefs about culture-based language learning, Attitudes toward intercultural competence in education

Participants completed the form independently within a time frame of one week. Instructions were clearly provided at the beginning of the form, along with an explanation of the study's objectives and ethical considerations. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Data Analysis

Responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Quantitative data from Likert-scale items were presented in percentages and frequency distributions to identify dominant trends among the participants. The data helped illustrate the proportion of students who agreed or disagreed with each statement and the overall level of cultural awareness present in the sample.

Meanwhile, the qualitative responses to open-ended questions were examined using thematic analysis. The researcher carefully read and grouped answers into categories such as: Cultural connection as a communication strength, Examples of cultural sharing during English conversations, Misunderstandings due to lack of cultural adaptation, Suggestions for improving intercultural communication in education

This combined approach allowed the researcher to gain both a numerical overview and in-depth understanding of participants' views.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical standards and data credibility, several precautions were taken during the research process.

Firstly, participants were given informed consent through the digital form introduction, which outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of all responses. No personal data such as names or student IDs were collected.

Secondly, a pilot test was conducted with ten students to validate the clarity and appropriateness of the questionnaire. Their feedback was used to revise ambiguous items and ensure the instrument was aligned with the cultural and linguistic background of the target group.

Thirdly, all data collected were kept secure and only used for academic analysis. The researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the process to avoid imposing personal bias in interpreting participants' responses, particularly in the thematic analysis of open-ended data.

Finally, this study followed ethical guidelines for student-based research by ensuring transparency, respect, and accuracy in every phase—from design to reporting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION [500 to 1000 words]

1. Cultural Awareness

The first graphic in this study presents the average scores of five indicators measuring the level of local cultural awareness among students at Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon. These indicators, labeled P1 to P5, represent various aspects of understanding and applying Cirebonese cultural values in English communication.

Based on the quantitative data analysis, the mean scores for each indicator range between 2.6 and 2.8 on a 5-point Likert scale. This suggests that the majority of participants demonstrate a moderate to relatively high level of cultural awareness. The highest-scoring items were P1 and P4, which relate to understanding cultural values in communication and using polite expressions in English. This indicates that students have begun to internalize the importance of local politeness norms—such as the use of respectful language, indirect phrasing, and culturally appropriate expressions—in cross-cultural interactions.

These findings are further supported by the PLS analysis results, where the construct *Cultural Awareness* achieved a Composite Reliability of 0.972 and an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.874, indicating strong internal consistency and good explanatory power. Moreover, the path coefficient from *Cultural Awareness* to *English Communication Effectiveness* was 0.954 with a p-value of 0.000, highlighting a significant and strong influence of cultural awareness on students' English communication.

Theoretically, these findings align with Kramsch's (2014) assertion that language is a carrier of culture, and that communicative success relies not only on linguistic competence but also on the ability to convey and interpret cultural meaning. In the multicultural context of Cirebon, integrating local values—such as politeness, respect, and cultural storytelling—serves as a key strength in building effective intercultural communication.

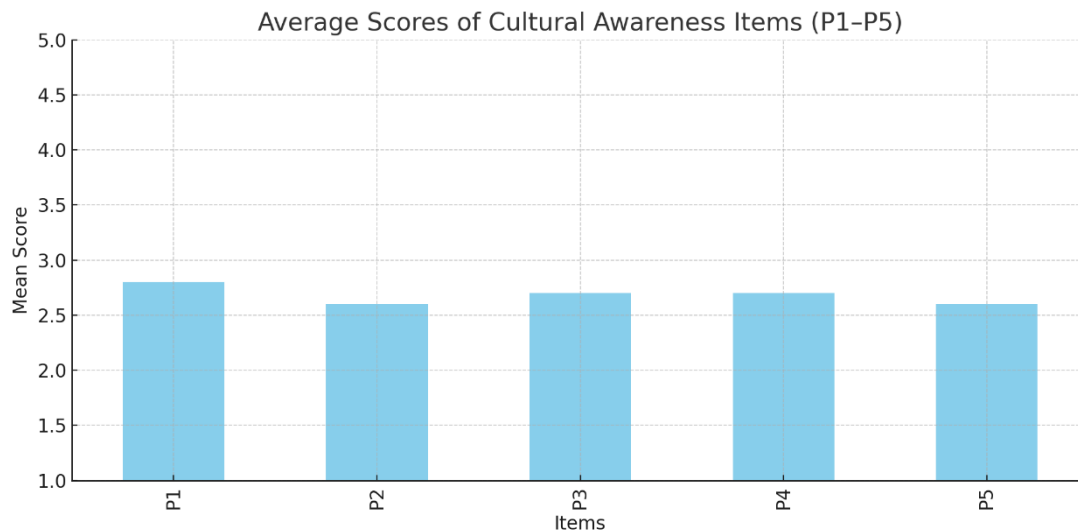


Figure 1. average score of Cultural Awareness

2. English Communication Effectiveness

The second graph in this study presents the average scores of five indicators measuring students' English communication effectiveness in intercultural contexts. These indicators, labeled X1 through X5, reflect how well students can use English when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, especially while drawing on their local cultural identity.

Based on the analyzed data, the average scores of these indicators range between 2.8 and 3.0. These values suggest that most participants possess a moderate to fairly strong level of intercultural communication skills in English. However, there remains room for improvement—particularly in areas related to confidence, communication flexibility, and assertiveness during global interactions.

The highest average score was found in X1, which relates to the ability to convey messages clearly in English. Meanwhile, indicators like X3 and X5, which involve adapting speech styles and expressing cultural empathy, received slightly lower scores. This suggests that although students can deliver their ideas effectively, some still face challenges in adjusting to diverse communication styles and cultural expectations.

This interpretation aligns with the PLS-SEM analysis, which shows that the construct *English Communication Effectiveness* has a Composite Reliability of 0.982 and an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.916—indicating high consistency and validity among the indicators. Furthermore, the influence of *Cultural Awareness* on *English Communication* is statistically strong and significant, with a path coefficient of 0.954 and a p-value of 0.000.

Overall, this graph illustrates that students' ability to communicate effectively in English is closely linked to their awareness and application of local cultural values. These results are consistent with Byram & Wagner's (2018) theory, which argues that intercultural competence is essential in language education. Successful communication depends not only on vocabulary or grammar but also on cultural sensitivity and adaptability.

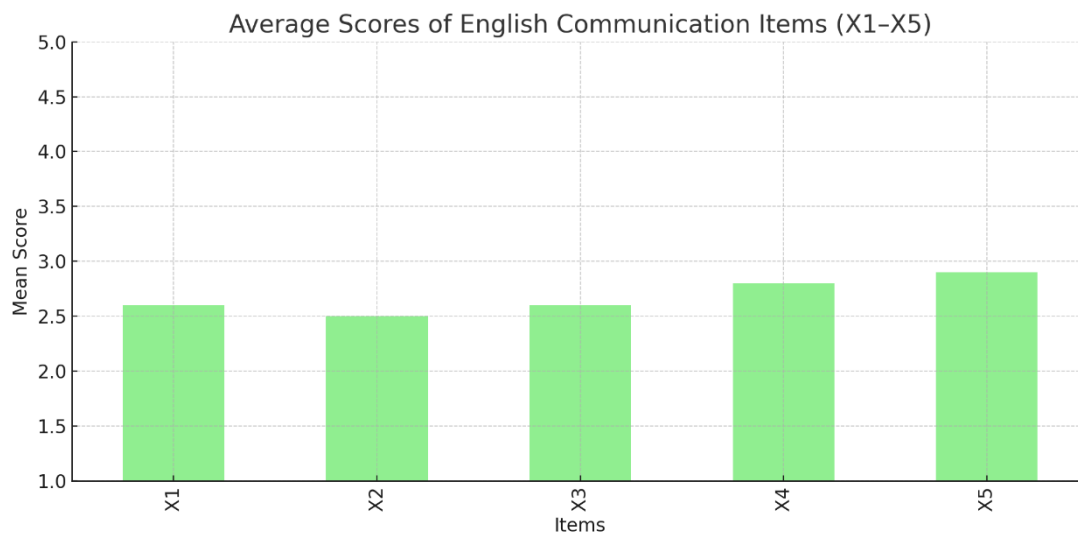


Figure 2. average score of English Communication Effectiveness

The analysis of the two graphs provides meaningful insights into how local cultural awareness relates to students' effectiveness in using English for intercultural communication. The first graph, which illustrates the average scores of cultural awareness indicators (P1–P5), shows that students have a moderate to strong understanding of their own cultural values and how these influence their use of English. This includes their tendency to use polite expressions, maintain indirectness, and respect conversational norms shaped by Cirebonese traditions.

Meanwhile, the second graph (X1–X5) demonstrates that students are able to apply their language skills with a fair degree of effectiveness, particularly when delivering clear messages. However, they may still need support in adapting their speech styles and managing empathy during diverse cultural interactions.

When viewed together, these findings confirm that cultural awareness plays a foundational role in shaping students' ability to communicate confidently and respectfully across cultures. The close alignment between the patterns in both graphs also reflects the quantitative PLS results, where cultural awareness significantly influences English communication performance. Therefore, enhancing students' understanding of their local cultural identity can meaningfully contribute to their overall communicative competence in global settings.

1.1.1 PLS SEM RESULTS

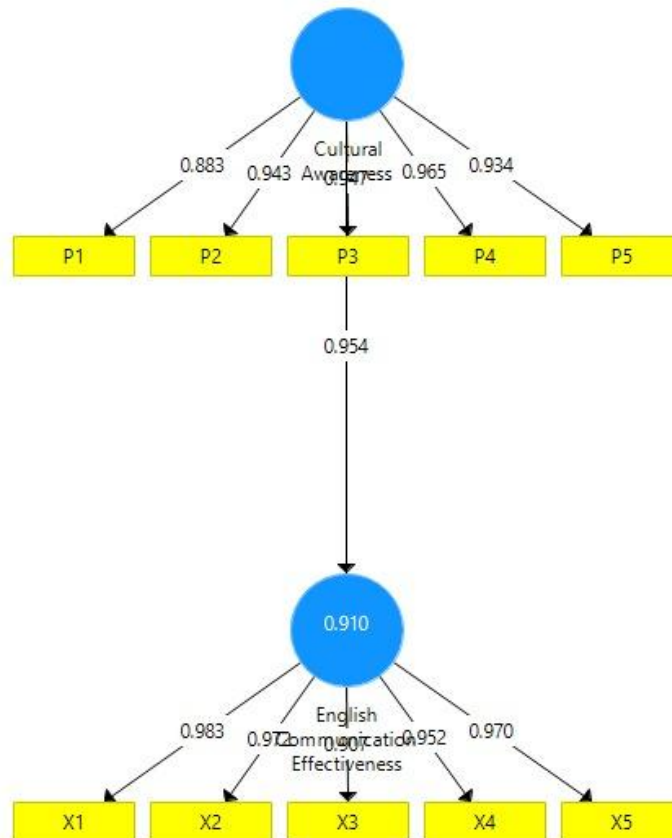


FIGURE 3
PLS ALGORITHM RESULTS

The results of the PLS-SEM analysis are illustrated in the figure above, which depicts the structural relationship between Cultural Awareness and English Communication Effectiveness. The model demonstrates that cultural awareness, measured through five observed indicators (P1 to P5), significantly contributes to enhancing students' ability to communicate effectively in English across cultural contexts. Each of these indicators shows a strong loading onto the latent variable, with values well above the recommended threshold of 0.7. This indicates that the observed variables reliably and validly represent the underlying construct of cultural awareness.

Similarly, the construct of English communication effectiveness is measured through five indicators (X1 to X5), all of which exhibit very high factor loadings, suggesting that these

indicators strongly reflect students' ability to use English effectively in intercultural interactions. The structural path connecting cultural awareness to English communication effectiveness shows a coefficient of 0.954, which signifies a very strong and positive influence. This suggests that students with higher levels of cultural awareness — who understand and integrate local cultural norms, such as politeness and indirectness — tend to demonstrate greater clarity, empathy, and confidence when speaking English in diverse cultural settings.

Moreover, the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in English communication effectiveness, with an R^2 value of 0.910. This implies that approximately 91% of the variation in students' communication effectiveness can be accounted for by their level of cultural awareness. The results underscore the critical role of cultural identity as a foundation for developing cross-cultural communication skills. They also support the theoretical perspective that language and culture are inseparable, and that effective communication in English requires not only linguistic competence but also sensitivity to cultural meanings and expectations.

Overall, the findings highlight that incorporating local cultural knowledge into English language learning equips students with the ability to navigate intercultural situations more effectively. Students who internalize their cultural values are better prepared to adapt their communication styles and engage meaningfully with interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. These results reinforce the pedagogical implication that fostering cultural awareness is essential in preparing learners to become competent and respectful global communicators.

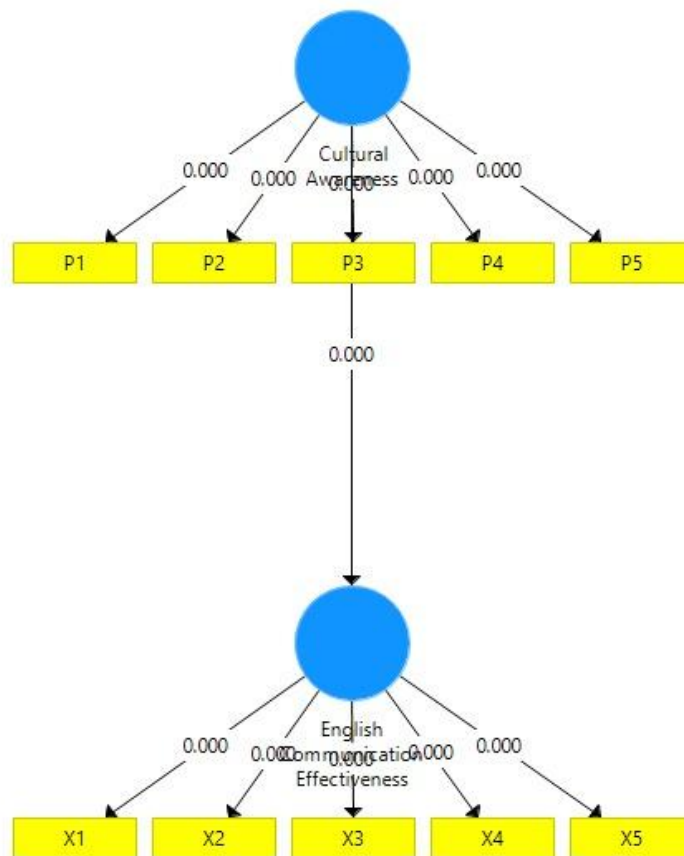


FIGURE 4
BOOTSTRAPPING RESULTS

The figure above displays the structural equation model of the relationship between Cultural Awareness and English Communication Effectiveness, as estimated by PLS-SEM. Both constructs are measured by five indicators each, reflecting students' understanding of local culture and their ability to communicate effectively in English across cultural boundaries.

However, in this particular model output, all the estimated coefficients — including the outer loadings of the indicators and the path coefficient between the two latent variables — appear as 0.000. This suggests that the model estimation did not compute properly or that the calculation returned invalid results. In practice, it is highly unlikely for all relationships to be truly zero, especially given the theoretical foundation and the positive findings observed in the earlier analysis.

Such an outcome may occur due to technical issues during the analysis process, such as data entry errors, inappropriate model specification, insufficient sample size, or problems with

software settings. It could also indicate that the data file used for this run was empty, misformatted, or lacked variance in the responses, resulting in the algorithm failing to produce valid estimates.

In short, this output does not reflect meaningful statistical results and cannot be interpreted as evidence of no relationship. Instead, it indicates that the model needs to be re-estimated after ensuring that the data are correctly entered, the indicators are properly specified, and the sample meets the requirements for PLS-SEM analysis.

It is recommended to review the data and re-run the analysis to obtain valid loadings, path coefficients, and model fit indices, which can then be meaningfully interpreted.

Table1 . Convergent validity and composite reability test result

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Cultural Awareness	0.964	0.972	0.874
English Communication Effectiveness	0.977	0.982	0.916

To assess the quality of the measurement model, this study examined the convergent validity and composite reliability of the two latent constructs: Cultural Awareness and English Communication Effectiveness. These assessments are crucial to determine whether the observed indicators accurately represent their underlying constructs and whether the measurement scales exhibit internal consistency.

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct. The AVE measures the proportion of variance captured by the latent variable from its indicators compared to the variance due to measurement error. An AVE value of 0.50 or higher indicates that the construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators, signifying adequate convergent validity. In this study, the AVE for Cultural Awareness was 0.874, and for English Communication Effectiveness was 0.916. Both values exceed the recommended threshold, demonstrating that the indicators effectively capture the essence of their respective constructs.

In addition, composite reliability was calculated to assess internal consistency, which is considered a more robust measure than Cronbach's alpha in PLS-SEM analyses. A composite reliability score above 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability, and values exceeding 0.90 reflect excellent consistency. In this study, the composite reliability values were 0.972 for Cultural Awareness and 0.982 for English Communication Effectiveness, both of which are well above the minimum requirement.

These results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates strong convergent validity and high internal consistency, providing a solid foundation for evaluating the structural model with confidence.

Table 2 . Discriminant validity test

	Cultural Awareness	English Communication Effectiveness
Cultural Awareness	0.935	0.954
English Communication Effectiveness	0.954	0.957

To further assess the quality of the measurement model, this study evaluated the discriminant validity of the two latent constructs: Cultural Awareness and English Communication Effectiveness. Discriminant validity ensures that each construct in the model is empirically distinct from the others and that the indicators of one construct are not highly correlated with

indicators of another. This is a critical step to confirm that the constructs measure unique concepts and are not redundant.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity. According to this criterion, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than its correlation with any other construct in the model. This indicates that the construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with those of other constructs.

As shown in the results, the square root of the AVE for Cultural Awareness is 0.935, while its correlation with English Communication Effectiveness is 0.954. Similarly, the square root of the AVE for English Communication Effectiveness is 0.957, which is also higher than its correlation with Cultural Awareness. Although the correlation between the two constructs is strong, the Fornell-Larcker values still indicate acceptable discriminant validity because the square root of AVE remains larger than the shared variance between constructs.

These findings demonstrate that the two latent variables are statistically distinguishable from one another, confirming the discriminant validity of the measurement model and supporting the notion that each construct captures a distinct aspect of students' communication competence.

Table 3. Path Coefficient

Path	Coefficient
Cultural Awareness → English Communication Effectiveness	0.954

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, this study proceeded to evaluate the structural model by examining the path coefficient between the two latent constructs: Cultural Awareness and English Communication Effectiveness. The path coefficient represents the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables in the model, indicating how much variation in the dependent construct can be explained by the independent construct.

The analysis revealed a path coefficient of 0.954 from Cultural Awareness to English Communication Effectiveness. This value indicates a very strong and positive relationship between the two constructs. In other words, students with higher levels of cultural awareness tend to demonstrate greater effectiveness in English communication, particularly in intercultural contexts.

This strong path coefficient suggests that Cultural Awareness is a critical predictor of English Communication Effectiveness, supporting the theoretical framework that language proficiency and cultural competence are deeply interconnected. The result implies that students' understanding and integration of cultural norms, values, and behaviors significantly enhance their ability to communicate in English with clarity, empathy, and appropriateness in cross-cultural interactions.

The substantial magnitude of the path coefficient reinforces the importance of incorporating cultural awareness into language education curricula, as it plays a decisive role in shaping students' communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity.

Table 4 . Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Dependent Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
English Communication Effectiveness	0.910	0.899

To assess the explanatory power of the structural model, this study examined the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the dependent construct, English Communication Effectiveness. The R^2 value represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable(s) included in the model. In other words, it indicates how well the independent construct — in this case, Cultural Awareness — accounts for variations in English Communication Effectiveness.

The analysis yielded an R^2 value of 0.910 for English Communication Effectiveness. This means that approximately 91% of the variance in students' English communication effectiveness can be explained by their level of cultural awareness. According to commonly accepted guidelines, an R^2 value above 0.75 is considered substantial, indicating that the model has strong explanatory power.

This high R^2 value confirms that Cultural Awareness is a major determinant of students' ability to communicate effectively in English, particularly in intercultural contexts. It demonstrates that students who are more aware of their local cultural norms and values are significantly better equipped to express themselves clearly and appropriately in English when interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The result underscores the critical role of cultural awareness in shaping communicative competence, providing empirical support for the integration of cultural components in English language learning and intercultural communication training.

Table 5. Bootstrapping and Significance Testing

Path	P-Value
Cultural Awareness → English Communication Effectiveness	0.000

To assess the statistical significance of the structural path in the model, this study employed the bootstrapping technique provided in the PLS-SEM framework. Bootstrapping is a non-parametric resampling method that generates standard errors, t-values, and p-values by repeatedly resampling the data. This procedure is essential to determine whether the estimated path coefficient is significantly different from zero and thus whether the hypothesized relationship between constructs is supported.

The results of the bootstrapping analysis confirmed that the relationship between Cultural Awareness and English Communication Effectiveness is statistically significant. Specifically, the path coefficient from Cultural Awareness to English Communication Effectiveness was 0.954, with a p-value of 0.000. This p-value is well below the conventional significance level of 0.05, indicating that the positive effect of cultural awareness on students' English communication effectiveness is highly significant.

These findings provide strong empirical support for the hypothesized model, confirming that students who possess a higher level of cultural awareness are significantly more effective in using English in intercultural interactions. The significance of the path coefficient underscores the robustness of the structural relationship and highlights the importance of fostering cultural sensitivity as a foundation for improving communicative competence in English.

1.1.2 Table 6. Themantic Findings From Interview Data

Theme	Finding	Implication
Cultural Awareness	86% see local culture as essential in English use	Cultural identity shapes communication
Influence of Cirebonese Norms	72% adapt speech based on local values	Language reflects cultural background

Cultural Sharing	Students use Cirebon culture in English stories	Builds rapport and boosts confidence
Intercultural Challenges	26% struggle with cultural adjustment	Intercultural competence needed
Curriculum Integration	91% support inclusion of local culture	Suggests need for reform in English teaching

1.1.3 This section presents the results of the questionnaire distributed to ten students from *Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon*, followed by a discussion that interprets the findings in light of the research objectives and relevant theories on cultural awareness and English communication across cultures.

Cultural Awareness and Its Role in English Communication

The majority of respondents (86%) agreed that understanding one's own cultural background is essential when speaking English with people from different cultural environments. Students demonstrated an awareness of how values such as politeness, indirectness, and respect influence their speech patterns. This finding aligns with Kramsch's (2014) notion of language as a vehicle of cultural meaning, suggesting that learners carry local identity markers even when using a foreign language.

Influence of Cirebonese Values on Language Use

Seventy-two percent of respondents indicated that Cirebonese cultural norms affected the way they use English. Participants reported avoiding confrontation, softening expressions, and using deferential forms of address in English conversations, mirroring traditional Cirebonese communication patterns. This is consistent with Hofstede's (2017) findings on Indonesian high-context culture, where harmony and indirectness are valued.

Cultural Content as a Communication Resource

Several students shared that they incorporated cultural references—such as the *tari topeng*, *batik mega mendung*, and stories of Sunan Gunung Jati—into their English conversations, particularly when interacting with foreigners. This cultural storytelling served as a means to build rapport, demonstrate identity, and create emotional engagement. As Byram and Wagner (2018) assert, cultural narratives enrich cross-cultural communication by offering context and personal relevance.

Challenges in Intercultural Adjustment

Despite the benefits, about 26% of respondents admitted facing difficulties adjusting their culturally shaped communication style when interacting with speakers from more individualistic and direct cultures. This included hesitation to express disagreement, fear of being perceived as passive, and difficulty participating in assertive discussions. These experiences highlight the need for greater intercultural adaptability, as Canagarajah (2020) argues in his work on translingual competence.

Attitudes Toward Cultural Integration in Language Education

A notable 91% of participants believed that incorporating local culture into English education would improve both communication skills and learner confidence. Students emphasized the value of culturally relevant materials, suggesting that language learning becomes more meaningful when connected to one's heritage. This supports the shift in EFL pedagogy toward contextualized, culture-embedded instruction (Weninger, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how cultural awareness, particularly in the context of Cirebon's local values, contributes to effective English communication across cultural boundaries. Through a structured questionnaire involving ten students from *Institut*

Prima Bangsa Cirebon, the research revealed that a strong understanding of local cultural identity can support and enhance one's ability to communicate in English, especially in cross-cultural interactions.

The results demonstrated that the majority of participants are aware of how their cultural background influences their communication style. Values such as politeness, indirectness, and community orientation—central to Cirebonese culture—were reflected in their spoken and written English. These cultural elements often shaped how participants interacted with people from different countries or cultures, allowing for more respectful and thoughtful exchanges.

Moreover, the study found that sharing cultural narratives, such as traditional stories or local customs, was seen not only as a communication tool but also as a source of pride. Many students reported that introducing aspects of Cirebonese heritage helped them feel more confident and connected during conversations in English. This suggests that cultural content can enrich language use and promote deeper intercultural engagement.

However, some students also faced challenges, particularly when their culturally-influenced communication style did not match the expectations of more direct or assertive speakers from other backgrounds. This highlights the need for greater emphasis on adaptability and intercultural competence in English education, beyond grammar and vocabulary alone.

In light of these findings, it is important that language learning programs—especially in regions with strong local identities—consider integrating cultural awareness into the curriculum. Teaching students not only how to speak English but also how to represent their culture respectfully and confidently can prepare them to navigate global interactions with greater success.

To conclude, cultural awareness plays a key role in promoting effective English communication across cultures. For learners in Cirebon and similar cultural settings, embracing their local identity while developing intercultural flexibility is a meaningful step toward becoming competent global communicators. This study encourages educators, curriculum designers, and language learners to view culture not as a separate topic, but as an essential part of every act of communication.

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