Management of Cross-cultural Communication Barriers for Indonesian Migrant Workers in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia, as a developing country, continues to grapple with a variety of labor challenges, including high unemployment rates and job scarcity. South Korea stands out as one of the destinations with a substantial presence of foreign migrant workers, including those from Indonesia. According to the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, the number of legal Indonesian citizens in South Korea has reached 37,000. Undoubtedly, Indonesian migrant workers encounter cross-cultural communication barriers in South Korea. This research aims to explore the cross-cultural communication challenges faced by Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) in South Korea and examine the strategies they employ to manage these barriers effectively. Adopting a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, data is gathered through interviews with Indonesian migrant workers from the fisheries, manufacturing, and tourism sectors in South Korea. The findings reveal that cultural disparities pose the primary challenge for IMWs in South Korea, affecting communication and causing discomfort. IMWs employ various strategies to address these communication barriers, focusing on managing language differences, adapting to work cultures, and fostering social networks to alleviate uncertainty and anxiety.

Keywords: Cross Cultural Communication, Migrant Workers, South Korea, Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory

ABSTRAK

Indonesia merupakan negara berkembang yang masih menghadapi beragam permasalahan ketenagakerjaan, di antaranya adalah angka pengangguran yang tinggi dan kurangnya lapangan pekerjaan. Korea Selatan merupakan salah satu negara dengan banyak pekerja migran asing yang datang dari banyak negara, termasuk di Indonesia. Kedutaan Besar Republik Indonesia mencatat jika WNI legal yang berada di Korea Selatan mencapai angka 37.000. Tidak dipungkiri, para pekerja migran asal Indonesia menghadapi hambatan komunikasi lintas budaya di Korea Selatan. Penelitian ini memahami hambatan komunikasi antarbudaya yang dialami Pekerja Migran Indonesia (PMI) di Korea Selatan, dan strategi mereka mengelola hambatan komunikasi lintas budaya tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi di mana data yang dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan PMI di Korea Selatan dari sektor perikanan, manufaktur, dan pariwisata. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan perbedaan budaya menjadi tantangan utama bagi PMI di Korea Selatan dan mempengaruhi komunikasi serta menimbulkan ketidaknyamanan. PMI menggunakan strategi untuk mengatasi hambatan komunikasi dengan fokus pada pengelolaan hambatan bahasa, budaya kerja, dan lingkungan pertemanan untuk mengurangi ketidakpastian dan kecemasan.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Lintas Budaya, Pekerja Migran, Korea Selatan, Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory

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INTRODUCTION

As a developing country, Indonesia grapples with challenges such as limited employment opportunities and high unemployment rates. By February 2023, the number of unemployed individuals in Indonesia had reached 7.99 million (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). Further data indicates that the highest open unemployment rate (TPT) stems from individuals with high school and vocational school education levels, accounting for 8.41% (Santika, 2023). Economic factors significantly influence Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) to migrate abroad (Djafar, 2023; Ramdhani, 2023). According to the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (BP2MI), the number of IMWs has consistently increased annually from 2008 to 2018 (Rolasta & Hoesin, 2022). Notably, the latest data for the G-to-G program in July 2023 recorded 7,568 IMW placements (BP2MI, 2023).

The number of migrants in South Korea continues to rise, expected to surpass 5% of the total migrant population (Cho, Kang, & Park, 2023; Denney & Green, 2021), including Indonesians. The Indonesian Embassy in Seoul reported over 50,000 Indonesian citizens (WNI) in South Korea, with more than 37,000 being IMWs (Diass, 2023), indicating the preference among Indonesian citizens to seek employment opportunities abroad. IMWs play a significant role across various industrial sectors in South Korea, with substantial placements observed in manufacturing, agriculture, and domestic work sectors. As recorded in the BP2MI report, IMWs placements have reached 24,088 people in October 2022 alone, dominated by IMWs from East Java (24%), Central Java (22%), and West Nusa Tenggara (16%) (Annur, 2022).

Despite their contributions, IMWs in South Korea face numerous challenges. These include difficulties tracking illegal IMWs, persistent issues with brokers, and insufficient government measures to protect migrant workers abroad (Khalid & Savirah, 2022). Additionally, concerns regarding human trafficking, transnational crime, high familial expectations, loneliness, and workplace injustices contribute to mental health disorders among IMWs (Regmi, Aryal, van Teijlingen, Simkhada, & Adhikary, 2020; Rustam, Sabilla, Rizki, & Estriani, 2022).

In the context of the IMWs in South Korea as a minority, important problems arise in the form of integration, citizenship status, and the like which need to be handled fairly (Srimulyani, 2021). In addition, IMWs in South Korea has produced cultural practices that give rise to a cosmopolitan migrant worker discourse associated with Eurocentric and elitist culture (Madrah, Suharko, & Sartika, 2021). Research shows that IMWs individuals in South Korea display certain behavior according to the context in which they are based on social demands because the boundaries between cultural groups are getting thinner, also because there are many mixed interactions (Suwarsi, Frendika, Abdurrahman, Herdiyati, & Nuralfiani, 2020).

Some of the striking experiences of the IMWs in South Korea are feeling afraid, anxious, feeling uncomfortable with the environment, and several other types of difficulties (Rismawaty, 2020). The non-ideal conditions that become obstacles between Indonesian and South Korean citizens ultimately have the potential to cause conflict, so IMWs need to try to adapt and approach themselves towards their work environment and living environment (Aulia, Lubis, & Kusumaningrum, 2022; Muhajirin & Shasrini, 2023).

Culture is transnational in nature, which is increasingly developing due to large digital growth, massive cultural exchange, and the ever-increasing flow of global migration of citizens (Szulc, 2023). Culture can change over time, especially if individuals or groups are in a new environment that has different cultural values and principles because cultures have different principles and value systems so that each culture determines different life goals for everyone (Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Mulyana & Rakhmat, 2014).

Cross-cultural communication is a process that occurs between individuals from different backgrounds who come into direct contact with each other, which has the potential to create cultural barriers, limiting communication between expatriates and local communities, which is not conducive to cultural exchange between the two parties, causing cultural clashes (Huang, Liu, Huang, & Ding, 2020; Shadiev, Wang, & Huang, 2021). Cross-cultural communication skills can be managed in an effort to create harmonious social relationships with other people who come from different countries or cultures so the experience of international migration and the intercultural interactions that occur can be beneficial for personal development to live in a multicultural society (Sarvinkhon, 2023; Kutor, Raileanu, & Simandan, 2021).

In South Korea, language is the main obstacle due to the large amount of vocabulary that is difficult to understand and the lack of interaction with local residents (Fathullah, Arianto, & Farid, 2023). In addition, different cultural foundations are a driving factor as well as an obstacle to the accommodation of cross-cultural communication (Avruch, 2019; Huiwen, Hashim, Sern, & Bidin, 2022).The consequences arising from differences in cultural backgrounds are stiffness in interaction and communication which allows anxiety and uncertainty to arise with the potential for obstacles in relationships.

In exploring and studying the experience of cross-cultural communication difficulties among IMWs in South Korea and how they manage these difficulties, the author sees that the Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory put forward by William B. Gudykunts can emphasize the phenomenon of this problem. This theory assumes that managing and worrying about being able to communicate effectively with foreigners from different cultures is important (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2016; Nadeem & Koschmann, 2023). In line with the AUM theory which explains how effective face-to-face communication is (Griffin, 2009), the choice of this theory is also in accordance with the context of cross-cultural communication carried out by IMWs with South Korean society directly.

There are several previous studies that are similar to the concept of cross-cultural communication, including research on the cross-cultural competencies possessed by Malaysian migrant workers, exploring the cross-cultural challenges of expatriates in Saudi Arabia, and the cultural gap between Chinese migrant workers and local residents (Dalib, Mohamad, Nadeem, Halim, & Ramlan, 2023; Dousin & Sulong, 2022; Jiang, Duan, & Tang, 2023). Other research explored the unique cross-cultural adjustment challenges experienced by South Korean and Canadian expatriates by looking at the magnitude of the cultural gap and examining black expatriates who had professional careers in South Korea who experienced discrimination and social bias (Arseneault, 2020; Dos Santos, 2020). Several implementations of AUM theory in research were also found in several previous cross-cultural communication studies which focused on the context of international Muslim students, expatriates, and Islamic boarding school (Atqiya, 2022; Hsu, Chen, Chiang, & Shaffer, 2024; Mohammed, Dalib, & Mumtaz, 2020).

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of communication barriers experienced by IMWs in South Korea. In order to achieve the research objectives, there are two problem formulations in this research: (1) what are the cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by IMWs in South Korea, and (2) what are the strategies for managing cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by IMWs in South Korea. This article tries to provide scientific references to accommodate the need for this information.

METHODS

This paper is based on a qualitative approach that explores IMWs's experiences when they experience intercultural communication barriers in South Korea. The research adopts the phenomenological method, a qualitative approach that focuses on the lived experiences of individuals or groups with specific characteristics. This method aims to provide deeper insights and understanding, which can serve as a foundation for further study (Husserl, 2012). The choice of the phenomenological method is based on the consideration that this method is the most adequate for exploring how individuals experience certain phenomena collectively (Creswell, 2014).

The phenomenon underlying this research focuses on understanding the collective experience of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) in South Korea as they face intercultural communication barriers arising from cultural differences between Indonesia and South Korea. Therefore, this research aims to elucidate their essential experiences in managing these intercultural communication barriers. Through phenomenological studies, individual life experiences are explored, illustrated, and described to create a universal depiction (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data for this research were collected from 10 Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) employed in South Korea's primary sectors: fisheries, manufacturing, and tourism. The selection of participants was conducted using purposive sampling, aiming to align the research topic with the role and specific characteristics of each participant (Sugiyono, 2017). The profile of the informants who participated in this research can be seen in Table 1.

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Table 1. Research Participants

No	Name	Status
1.	Source person 1	Retired IMW in fisheries sector
2.	Source person 2	Retired IMW in fisheries sector
3.	Source person 3	IMW with profession as Senior research and Development Manager (manufacturing / petrochemical sector)
4.	Source person 4	Chung-Ang University alumni and IMW in manufacturing sector
5.	Source person 5	IMW in tourism sector
6.	Source person 6	IMW in tourism sector
7.	Source person 7	IMW in tourism sector
8.	Source person 8	IMW in fisheries sector
9.	Source person 9	IMW in manufacturing sector
10.	Source person 10	IMW in fisheries sector

Source: Author's Analysis, 2023

The selection of the number of participants in this study was based on the ideal size for phenomenological research. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research typically involves exploring the life experiences of individuals or groups who have experienced the phenomenon, ideally comprising a heterogeneous group of 10 to 15 participants. Additionally, the number of participants was determined based on data saturation observed during the data analysis stage.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews. This technique is systematic and flexible, allowing the researcher to develop interview questions based on the responses provided by participants to obtain more detailed information (Creswell, 2014). Data were collected and analyzed until reaching data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerged from the interviews. All participants were assigned anonymous identity codes to protect their real identities.

Data analysis involved systematically organizing and compiling the collected data to draw conclusions that are comprehensible to both the researcher and others (Sugiyono, 2017). This research followed the phenomenological data reduction process as outlined by Moustakas (1994), which includes bracketing, horizontalizing, identifying themes, and constructing textural descriptions. During bracketing, the researcher maintained neutrality by setting aside personal knowledge and biases, allowing participants to share their experiences without feeling intimidated. Horizontalizing involved identifying significant statements from the interview data.

After obtaining significant statements, the researcher identified themes through two cycles of coding. As per Creswell (2014), two-cycle coding helps explore overlapping data and achieve data saturation. Finally, textural descriptions were constructed to represent the participants' experiences as revealed through the interviews (Moustakas, 1994). This comprehensive data analysis process resulted in identifying the main themes related to the barriers IMWs face in cross-cultural communication in South Korea and how they manage these obstacles.

To uphold research ethics, the author adhered to regulations established by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI), 2019). These regulations ensured that all interviews respected the rights and privacy of the participants. Before the interviews, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and their information would remain confidential and used solely for research purposes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) regarding the cross-cultural communication barriers they experienced while working in South Korea. The research addresses two primary areas: (1) the cross-cultural communication barriers faced by IMWs in South Korea, and (2) the strategies employed to manage these barriers.

Barriers to Cross-Cultural Communication for Indonesian Migrant Workers in South Korea

The investigation into the experiences of IMWs revealed four significant barriers they encounter in their daily lives due to cultural differences between Indonesia and South Korea. These barriers are: (a) language differences, (b) racist behavior, (c) differences in work habits and culture, and (d) differences in social order when making friends.

Language Differences as a Main Barrier

The majority of IMWs indicated that the Korean language is their primary challenge. This includes not only the spoken and written forms but also the use of Hangeul, the Korean script (P002, P003). One informant emphasized the stark contrast between Korean and Indonesian languages, both verbally and in writing, noting that a lack of proficiency in Korean increases the potential for fraud and exploitation by native citizens (P005).

The informants' experiences underscore the crucial role of Korean language skills in their lives. The disparity between the Korean and Indonesian scripts and dialects is a significant concern for IMWs. This aligns with Samovar et al. (2012) who noted that poor language skills in a foreign environment hinder the ability to establish harmonious relationships with locals and increase the potential for conflict. Additionally, Adanlawo et al. (2021) found that mastering the local language is the most critical aspect for foreign workers.

Racist Behavior as a Threat to Social Life

The cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by IMWs in South Korea are related to racist behavior. Despite South Korea's modernity, cases of racist behavior by local residents persist, particularly among those who do not regularly interact with immigrants (P005). This behavior confirms the necessity of tolerance when adapting to new environments, especially from local individuals with strong ethnocentric views. Fomenko et al. (2020) also noted that racist behavior often occurs when majority culture groups are required to coexist with minority immigrants, necessitating adaptation and tolerance efforts to foster a harmonious social life.

Differences in Work Habits and Culture

Furthermore, the cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by IMWs in South Korea include significant differences in work culture. South Korea and Indonesia have fundamentally different cultural frameworks. Similar to Japan and China, South Korea adheres to the Confucian philosophy of life, which fundamentally influences moral values, way of life, and social relations in society. In contrast, Indonesian culture is guided by Pancasila with the motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," created thanks to the diversity of tribes, religions, races, and customs.

When discussing work culture, Indonesians rely heavily on mutual cooperation. Meanwhile, Korean Confucian culture creates power distance and hierarchy in the workplace. This clash of differences is evident in how Koreans and Indonesians carry out their work, both in formal and informal sectors. Native South Koreans highly value ethics, moral values, and discipline. It is not surprising that the work culture in South Korea is characterized by upholding hierarchy, being oriented towards creating harmonious relationships, and demanding high dedication to work (P007). Similar experiences were also shared by other informants.

> *"Native Korean people really value discipline. For example, they only work during working hours, while rest time is actually used to rest. Unlike Indonesia, where the work culture tends to have a flexible time rhythm. However, South Korean bosses and colleagues are also known for maintaining positive relationships in the workplace, so there is still a strong atmosphere of camaraderie here." (P002).*

In the manufacturing sector, professional workers are employed in industrial companies in South Korea. In this sector, workplace adaptation is crucial because the majority of coworkers are native Koreans (P003). Another important aspect to note is that, according to P004, who works in biochemistry, the working hours in his company in Korea are from 10 am to 7 pm. Spending nine hours a day directly interacting with Korean colleagues, IMWs must adapt, collaborate, and navigate

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different cultural dynamics. These moments represent significant challenges for IMWs, requiring them to develop themselves and adapt to perform their roles effectively in the workplace.

Figure 1. Lunch atmosphere at a South Korean manufacturing company. This situation provides an opportunity for cross-cultural communication among workers.
Source: Personal documentation belonging to P009 (2021)

In the fisheries sector, IMWs work at sea with a schedule that changes depending on the season. In summer fishing boats catch net fish, in winter they catch crabs, while in other seasons they usually catch squid. Koreans really value sustainability in their work, so in winter fishermen are not allowed to catch squid to give these animals a chance to reproduce. In this sector, IMWs's physical and psychological condition will be forged. Especially if IMWs do not have sufficient experience. On the ship, IMWs will face fellow IMWs, migrant workers from other countries, and local male bosses. The characteristics of a Korean superior are firm and authoritative (P002). There is a distance between superiors and subordinates in the work area. They will assess an employee based on performance and resilience. The boss, who is usually the ship owner, is much more experienced and will directly assess how the employees who are sailing together are performing.
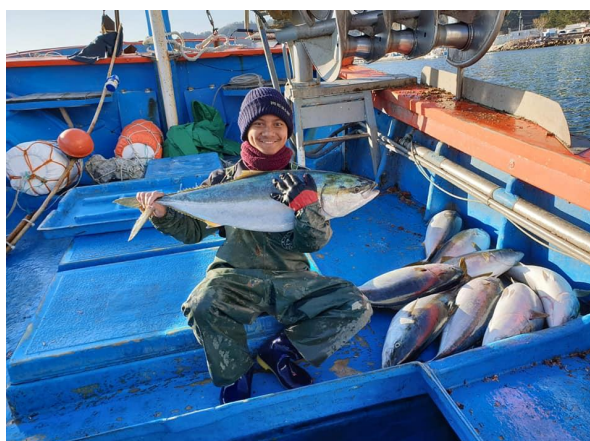
Figure 2. Taking photos with fish caught in Gangwon-do, South Korea
Source: Personal documentation belonging to P002 (2018)

Based on this collective experience, it can be found that IMWs in South Korea interpret an optimistic and positive view regarding the work culture implemented by native South Koreans. In line with the experience of the informants, Gemeda & Lee (2020) stated that in a professional context, native Koreans tend to have high dedication and enthusiasm so that discipline and hard work are

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behaviors that are inherent in them. As immigrants, this work culture indirectly helps IMWs's adaptation process in South Korea.

Differences in Social Orders in Making Friends
The cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by IMWs in South Korea extend to the social dynamics of friendship. Accustomed to the warmth of Indonesian social culture, IMWs find it challenging to adjust to South Korean norms, where people tend to display reserved and indifferent behavior, rarely smiling at strangers (P004, P008, P010).

The collective experiences of the informants underscore the social behavior differences as significant obstacles to cross-cultural communication faced by IMWs in South Korea. It's undeniable that when IMWs embark on their new lives in South Korea, their ingrained understanding of behavioral norms from their home culture persists. Thus, when confronted with conflicting principles and values, they must exert extra effort to adapt.

Research conducted in China, where the local population also adheres to Confucianism similar to South Korea, highlights that migrant workers (15.3%) exhibit higher levels of depression compared to non-migrant workers (12.0%) (Li, Dai, Wu, Gao, & Fu, 2019). The level of depression among immigrants tends to depend on the high level of individualism in the country of origin, where Koreans are individualist in orientation and therefore have a limited and narrow radius of trust in intimate social circles (Frank & Hou, 2019; Lim, Im, & Lee, 2021).

These findings regarding cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by IMWs in South Korea are generally closely related to the statement of Ting-Toomey & Chung (2012) that cultural distance is a factor that is strongly integrated in conditions of cultural differences in a place. This cultural distance revolves around understanding principles and values, use of language, verbal communication cues, and work culture.

Furthermore, the barriers to cross-cultural communication experienced by IMWs in South Korea are a phenomenon called culture shock. In the context of IMWs as a group of immigrants in South Korea, the phenomenon of culture shock that they experience is common due to such a contrasting transition between the culture in their place of origin and their new place, however, this condition is part of the process of adapting to the new culture (Samovar et al., 2012).

The integration strategy for migrants can be done through three important things, including the role of the family as a network of community, discrimination experience, and trust in God (Ikafa, Hack-Polay, Walker, & Mahmoud, 2022). Collectively, IMWs in South Korea experience cross-cultural communication barriers that are similar to each other and they interpret them as challenges that can be overcome along with the process of adaptation or getting used to themselves.

Strategy for Managing Cross-cultural Communication Barriers for Indonesian Migrant Workers in South Korea
After identifying what cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by IMWs in South Korea, the interview process also investigated the strategies they used to manage the cross-cultural communication barriers that occurred. In general, the management strategies they implement are based on aspects that they identify as barriers to intercultural communication, namely linguistic aspects, and social behavior patterns–both in professional and friendship environments.

Adapting to Script Diversity and Dialectics to Manage Ambiguity
Most IMWs disclosed that the most effective approach to addressing differences in Korean language script and dialects was to acquaint themselves with Korean—both spoken and written—prior to their departure for South Korea for work (P001). Another informant emphasized that, despite having an intermediate level of proficiency in Korean, it is essential to muster the courage to engage in conversations with Koreans, as native speakers generally appreciate efforts to communicate in their language, even if mistakes in pronunciation or meaning occur (P003).

This collective insight illustrates that IMWs in South Korea concur on their ability to adapt to existing language disparities. They view these differences as a catalyst to continue engaging with and fostering harmonious relationships with native Koreans. This strategy for overcoming intercultural communication barriers aligns with several analogous studies, which assert that familiarizing oneself with commonly used dialects is the optimal approach for managing ambiguity related to language use. (Alagjozovska, 2022; Bokuniewicz, 2020; Lund, 2021).

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Tolerance in the Work Environment
In addressing cross-cultural communication barriers associated with work culture, informants employed in the formal sector highlighted the appreciation from their native Korean superiors and colleagues for presenting new ideas or proposals aimed at fostering collaboration with Indonesia (P003). Conversely, an informant engaged in the informal sector remarked on how the South Korean work culture facilitated the cultivation of a confident work ethic, thereby bolstering personal motivation for professional growth (P001).

Drawing from their shared experiences, it becomes evident that the work culture prevalent among native South Koreans can yield positive outcomes for foreign workers. The structured environment and emphasis on professionalism serve as motivational factors driving foreign workers toward self-improvement. (Bokuniewicz, 2020).

Empathize and Understand Differences in Cultural Principles in the Context of Friendship
The strategy employed by IMWs in South Korea to manage communication barriers pertains to the social dynamics of friendship. Research indicates that minorities who cultivate numerous friendships with the majority or establish strong bonds within minority groups through positive relationships with majority friends experience heightened emotional well-being (Jasini, De Leersnyder, Gagliolo, et al., 2023), hereby fostering inclusivity (Jasini, De Leersnyder, Ceulemans, Gagliolo, & Mesquita, 2023).

Despite the tendency of native South Koreans to exhibit reserve, particularly towards foreigners, this does not preclude the existence of social activities in the country. An IMW employed in the informal sector recounted how their company regularly organizes gatherings to foster closer relationships among colleagues (P001). For this immigrant, such social events proved instrumental in acclimating to the social norms prevalent among native South Koreans. However, the situation in the formal sector presents a contrasting scenario. In the interview, a IMW who works in the formal sector said that:

> "*When Korean people get angry, it's only for that moment, after that it's over. So don't take it to heart (get emotional). That's the challenge. It's an obstacle for me, but I'm looking for a solution, to be indifferent and don't get emotional. Apart from that, they are also really appreciate someone's gifts. For example, when they help me, I usually buy them food or snacks, and they interpret that as a sign of friendship*." (P003).

Based on the collective experiences they shared, it becomes apparent that IMWs in South Korea adapt themselves to the prevailing patterns of behavior within both the informal and formal sectors, albeit with slight variations in the social environment of friendship. In essence, all IMWs employ a similar strategy for managing cross-cultural communication barriers by observing, learning, and emulating the norms and practices prevalent in their new environment. This concerted effort is aimed at aligning themselves with the majority group, namely the native population of South Korea.

The collective experience of several IMWs in South Korea increasingly confirms that South Korea is a country that adheres to a low-level communication culture. Ting-Toomey & Chung (2012) explained that a low-context communication culture entails brief and explicit communication, minimizing the dominance of non-verbal symbols within the culture. The same thing was also expressed in research results (Prince, 2021) that individuals in minority positions within a cultural context tend to conform to cultural norms to gain acceptance and mitigate horizontal conflicts stemming from cultural disparities.

The strategy for managing cross-cultural communication barriers among IMWs in South Korea transcends individual initiatives for adaptation. Rather, South Korea offers various platforms catering to Indonesian citizens who have migrated to the country. These platforms include the Indonesian Mass Organization Communication Forum (FORKOMASI), the Indonesian Professionals Association in South Korea (IPA-KR), and the Association of Indonesian Researchers in South Korea (APIK). These forums host regular gatherings, providing IMWs with opportunities for meaningful discussions and alleviating feelings of excessive anxiety associated with migration to South Korea.

In summary, the research results can be observed in the illustrative chart below:
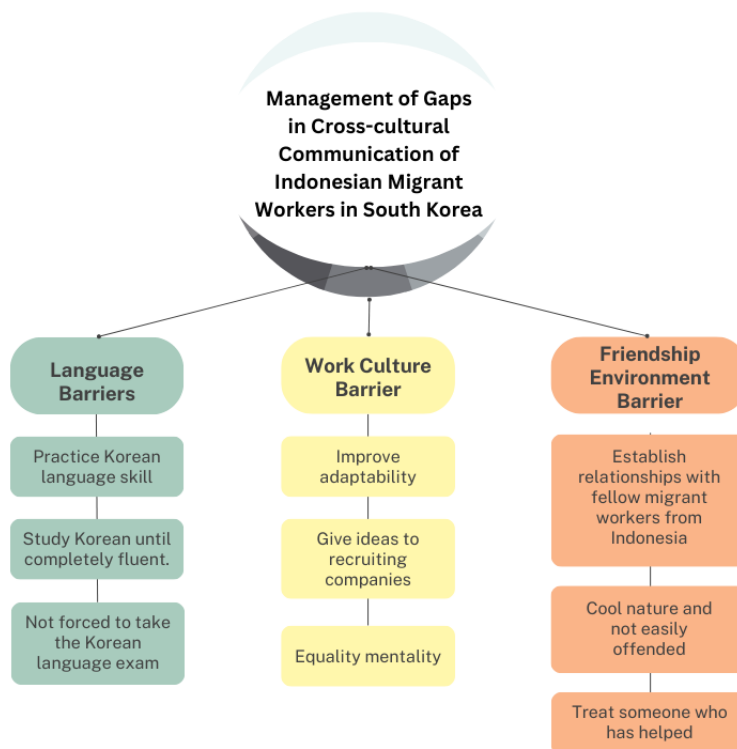
Figure 3. Management of Cross-cultural Communication Barriers of Indonesian Migrant Workers in South Korea
Source: Author's Analysis (2023)

The findings of this research are closely related to the Anxiety and Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory which was popularized by William B. Gudykunst. This theory explains how the perceived effectiveness of intercultural communication is and emphasizes that reducing anxiety and intergroup communication can act as a basic cause of communication effectiveness so that the meaning conveyed by the sender of the message is more important than the message itself (Gul, Wasti, & Hassan, 2023; Meng, Li, & Zhang, 2022).

The sources acknowledged that there were various barriers to intercultural communication experienced from various aspects. However, they try to manage cross-cultural communication barriers as best as possible. P004 explains:

"With the various cultural challenges that Indonesians face in South Korea, in the end we made various efforts to overcome the problems we faced. "If we are flexible in communicating, local people will respond well to us." (P004)

The causes of anxiety and uncertainty in cross-cultural encounters refer to surface factors, namely self-concept, motivation for interacting with strangers, responses to strangers, social categories of strangers, situational processes, and with other people. summary of foreigners (Kusuma, Sihabudin, & Widowati, 2023; Sun, Li, Hashim, Tham, & Bidin, 2023). Based on the findings, the author can say that the informants in South Korea were able to establish relationships with reactions in the form of anxiety management and communication management which were considered positive.

The AUM theory assumes that if anxiety and worry need to be confronted with mindfulness it is important to avoid our way of thinking that is focused on our own values, frames, and communication styles (Nurindra, Utari, & Sudarmo, 2021; Suryaningtyas & Muliawanti, 2020). This can create better individual behaviour in dealing with strangers so that they do not only take advantage of the perceptions or stereotypes inherent in them. Even so, there is a paradox that accompanies the concept of mindfulness where a person can increasingly feel anxiety and uncertainty due to increasing

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awareness of the large cultural differences between himself and the people around him. This can cause feelings of inferiority. In line with P007's explanation which said that:

> *"In the workplace, we are aware that we are immigrants from other countries and that often puts us in an unequal position. Even though in reality we are equal to them. Don't just because we are immigrants treat ourselves differently from them." (P007)*

Cross-cultural communication skills are instrumental in bridging cultural divides, enabling individuals to transform into multicultural entities capable of navigating diverse cultural identities and fostering effective interpersonal communication (Aririguzoh, 2022). To develop proficiency in cross-cultural communication and foster integration in unfamiliar environments, it is essential to cultivate empathy, cultural awareness, and tolerance (Safi, Agustin, & Rizal, 2023), particularly in addressing the complexities of the super diversity phenomenon(Zhang-Wu, 2023). Overall, Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) in South Korea demonstrate these skills, and their positive experiences contribute to their inclination to continue their careers in the country.

CONCLUSION

Cultural disparities pose inevitable challenges for individuals relocating to new environments. The ability to adapt and assimilate becomes crucial for fostering harmony in unfamiliar surroundings. However, amidst efforts to harmonize, individuals often encounter various obstacles that cause discomfort.

In summary, this research underscores that cultural differences, such as language disparities and social behavior variances, serve as primary impediments to cross-cultural communication for Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) in South Korea. These obstacles stem from significant disparities in cultural values between Indonesia and South Korea. Additionally, the study elucidates strategies employed by IMWs to surmount these communication barriers, facilitating effective communication while minimizing uncertainty and anxiety inherent in interacting with foreigners.

The author aims for this research to offer recommendations and insights for prospective migrant workers, particularly those facing substantial cultural disparities between their place of origin and destination. Furthermore, the findings highlight practical approaches for managing ambiguity to mitigate uncertainty and anxiety in communication with unfamiliar individuals.

Building upon these findings, future studies could delve deeper into specific work sectors among IMWs. This approach could yield more nuanced insights tailored to particular industries, as work cultures may vary across sectors and fields of concentration.

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