



# Intercultural Communicative Competence in Hybrid Classrooms: Identity Negotiation among Indonesian EFL Students

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**Abstract:** This study aims to reposition ICC as a relational practice negotiated situationally through the lens of classroom ethnography. The research was conducted over one semester in a Public Speaking course at a private university, involving 16 sixth-semester students. Data were collected through audio-visual recordings of classes, chat transcripts, presentation slides, reflective notes, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Analysis was conducted iteratively through open coding, thematic clustering, and identity-positioning-based reading. The results show that ICC manifests as fluctuating positioning, shaped by fluency performance, code-switching strategies, camera visibility management, and cross-channel participation. The hybrid classroom functions as a sociomaterial intercultural contact zone that mediates legitimacy, vulnerability, and identity negotiation. This study concludes that ICC is more appropriately understood as situated accomplishment (relational, embodied, and technologized) rather than as a stable competence.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communicative Competence, hybrid classroom, identity negotiation, classroom ethnography, sociomateriality

## Introduction

Today's classroom is no longer entirely physical, but neither is it entirely digital. It moves between screen and face-to-face, between visible and mediated presence, between audible voices and those conveyed through devices. In this hybrid classroom configuration, communication doesn't simply take place; it is renegotiated. However, while pedagogical practices have rapidly adapted to the hybrid model, our understanding of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) often remains trapped within the old framework: competence as an individual attribute, as a set of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that can be measured and developed linearly (Hua & Soh, 2026; Hwang et al., 2024; Syam, Nurhikmah, & AP, 2023; Xu et al., 2025).

This tension is the starting point of this article. On the one hand, ICC in classical literature, for example, through the Byram or Deardorff models, has provided an important foundation for understanding the dimensions of attitudes, skills, and awareness in cross-

cultural communication. On the other hand, the development of increasingly digitalized learning spaces challenges the assumption that such competence is stable, located within the individual, and can be practiced consistently across contexts. In the hybrid classroom, identity, social position, and linguistic legitimacy continue to shift in response to the dynamics of interactions, technology, and the power relations that accompany them.

Research on ICC in the Indonesian EFL context has tended to position competency as something possessed and measured through surveys or quantitative instruments (Cancino & Nuñez, 2023; Mootosamy & Aryadoust, 2024; Syam & Nurhikmah, 2025; Trang & Phuong, 2023). This approach certainly provides a macro-level picture of intercultural sensitivity or cultural awareness. However, it often overlooks how this competency is enacted in everyday interaction practices, especially when students must negotiate their own cultural and linguistic identities in fluid, layered learning situations such as hybrid learning. In other words, there is a shift that has not yet been fully addressed: from ICC as an attribute to ICC as a relational practice that is performed and negotiated situationally.

Furthermore, the hybrid classroom is not simply a technical combination of online and offline. It forms a new communication ecology: cameras that can be turned on or off, chat features that enable parallel participation, digital pauses that can be interpreted as reflection or doubt, and a distribution of attention split between physical space and the screen. In this context, identity negotiation no longer occurs solely through verbal speech but also through other semiotic choices: silence, code-switching, the use of emojis, body positioning in front of the camera, and even the decision to be present visually. In this context, the ICC becomes a practice interwoven within a web of human relations, technology, and institutional norms (Eren, 2024; Giustini, 2025; Syam, Nurhikmah, Abrar, et al., 2023; Tsintsadze, 2025).

The Identity Negotiation approach helps interpret these dynamics as never-ending processes. Indonesian EFL students' identities in hybrid spaces are not solely tied to national or ethnic categories, but also to their positions as non-native English speakers, as students in a global academic space, and as individuals who bring local values to their English-language interactions. Every spoken contribution, every language choice, and every response to differences reflects an attempt to position oneself, sometimes confidently, sometimes cautiously, in a complex intercultural landscape (Kundu et al., 2025; Nigar et al., 2025; Nurhikmah et al., 2023; Yu, 2024). At this point, ICC can no longer be understood as a 'ready-made' competency, but rather as an ongoing process of becoming.

Building on this tension, this article proposes a rereading of ICC in the hybrid EFL context through the lens of ethnographic inquiry. Rather than asking how high students' competencies are, this research explores how these competencies are practiced, questioned, and negotiated in real-life classroom interactions. By closely observing students'

communication practices, participation patterns, and reflective narratives over a semester of hybrid learning, this research seeks to capture the micro-dynamics often overlooked in instrument-based approaches.

Specifically, this study explores how Intercultural Communicative Competence manifests in hybrid classroom interactions and how Indonesian students in an EFL context negotiate their cultural and linguistic identities in a fragmented learning space between physical and digital spaces. By focusing on the situationally emergent interaction practices, positioning, and meaning patterns, this article contributes to a shift from ICC as a static entity to ICC as a contextual, dynamic, relational practice.

Through this approach, the hybrid classroom is seen not merely as a pedagogical setting but as an intercultural contact zone where identity, language, and technology intertwine—amidst the shifting landscape of higher education, understanding ICC as an ethnographically negotiated process opens new possibilities for rereading the roles of students, lecturers, and digital ecologies in shaping more reflective, conscious intercultural experiences.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research design***

This research adopts a classroom ethnography approach within an interpretivist inquiry framework to understand Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) not as an individual attribute, but as a relational practice enacted in everyday interactions. In the hybrid classroom context, communication occurs across physical and digital spaces, so competence cannot be understood as a stable ability but rather as a situational, dynamic negotiation process. The choice of ethnographic study was driven by the need to capture communication practices in a naturalistic, context-sensitive manner. This approach enabled the researcher to conduct a prolonged engagement over a semester to observe how Indonesian EFL students position themselves, manage differences, and construct intercultural meaning through speech, code-switching, participation patterns, and other semiotic choices within the hybrid space. This design explores how cultural and linguistic identities are negotiated within a sociomaterial learning ecology in which technology shapes visibility, participation, and power relations. The research focus shifts from measuring competence to understanding ICC as a process of becoming continuously shaped by interactional practices.

### ***Participants***

The participants in this study were 16 sixth-semester English Education students at a private university in Indonesia enrolled in a Public Speaking course delivered in a hybrid classroom format. This number was maintained naturally in line with the class composition,

while also allowing for in-depth engagement within the framework of classroom ethnography. The focus of the research was not on quantitative representation, but rather on the depth of interactions and the dynamics of communication practices that developed throughout the semester. As final-year students, the participants were in a transitional phase into the professional world, making the demands of performativity in English, especially in public presentations, significantly greater. In the Public Speaking space, which combined face-to-face and synchronous online sessions, they simultaneously positioned themselves as EFL speakers, aspiring professionals, and members of a global academic community. This configuration provided a productive space for observing the process of identity negotiation and for examining how Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) manifests in presentation practices, audience responses, and presence management across physical and digital spaces. All students participated in classroom observations, while seven volunteered for in-depth interviews to enrich their interpretations of their intercultural experiences.

### *Materials and data collection procedures*

Within the framework of classroom ethnography, data are understood as traces of communication practices that emerge through sustained engagement in a hybrid classroom. This research took place over one semester (14 meetings) in the Public Speaking course, encompassing both face-to-face and synchronous online sessions. All sessions were audio-visually recorded with participants' consent, resulting in approximately 26 hours of recorded interactions that captured presentation dynamics, audience responses, and participation patterns across physical and digital spaces. In addition to class recordings, research materials included chat transcripts from online sessions, student presentation slides, and reflective notes written after several presentations. These documents provided insights into how students interpreted their performative experiences within an intercultural context. To deepen our understanding of identity negotiation, seven students participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes) that explored their experiences managing language, confidence, and cultural positioning while performing in a hybrid classroom. The data collection process was iterative, allowing the focus of observations to evolve as interaction patterns relevant to ICC as an enacted and situated practice emerged.

### *Data analysis*

Data analysis was conducted in a phased and interpretive manner, in line with the classroom ethnography approach and the identity negotiation framework. Rather than separating data by type, all materials (class recordings, chat transcripts, presentation slides, reflective notes, and interview transcripts) were read as a unified ecology of communication

practices. The primary focus of the analysis was how Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) manifested in interactions, rather than how it was expressed declaratively. The initial stage of analysis involved iterative reading and viewing to identify interaction episodes that demonstrated moments of positional negotiation, shifts in participation, or tensions in language performativity. These episodes were then openly coded, noting patterns such as code-switching, managing silence, responding to differing perspectives, and strategies for establishing self-legitimacy as EFL speakers. In the next stage, the analysis moved toward thematic clustering, integrating field findings with the theoretical lenses of ICC and identity positioning. This process enabled a reading of ICC as an enacted practice that emerged through presentation practices, audience responses, and the dynamics of visibility in hybrid spaces. The final interpretation is constructed through a continuous dialogue between empirical data and the conceptual framework, resulting in a contextual description (thick description) of how identity and competence are negotiated situationally.

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***Results***

The analysis shows that Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the hybrid public speaking classroom does not exist as a stable competency, but rather as a constantly fluctuating practice of positioning. Students who exhibit fluency and confidence in face-to-face presentations may adopt a more passive demeanor in online sessions, choosing to disable their cameras or engage through chat. This transition is not merely a change in performance but an integral aspect of an identity negotiation process shaped by visibility, audience, and technology mediation.

In this context, ICC is better understood as a contextual achievement, manifested through fluency management, code-switching, and control over visual presence. The hybrid classroom constitutes a sociomaterial ecology in which language, the body, and digital platforms are interconnected. Competence is not a fixed possession but is continually shaped by the interplay of performativity, academic expectations, and the dynamics of involvement in both physical and digital realms.

#### ***a. Performing fluency, negotiating vulnerability***

In the context of hybrid classroom-based public speaking, fluency emerges as both a symbol of legitimacy and a source of vulnerability. Students strive to maintain a smooth flow of speech, minimize pauses, and avoid visible hesitation to sound "competent." However, it is precisely when that fluency breaks down that the process of identity negotiation becomes most visible. Fluency is not only about linguistic ability, but also about

how one positions oneself as a credible English speaker before both physical and digital audiences.

In one in-person session, P5 opened his presentation with a steady voice:

“Today I would like to explain the impact of social media on youth activism...”

But while explaining the data, he paused and said:

“Eh... sorry... what is ‘*peningkatan signifikan*’... ah, significant increase.”

He chuckled and added,

“My brain is switching too fast.”

A light response from the audience followed the laughter. This moment of self-repair was not simply a mistake, but a strategy to maintain face while acknowledging limitations.

In an online session, P3 explicitly stated:

“I feel more nervous speaking online because I can see myself on the screen.”

Reflexivity toward voice and accent suggests that digital spaces enhance self-awareness. These findings suggest that ICC is practiced as an attempt to balance performance and vulnerability, a process in which legitimacy is constructed precisely through the management of fragile moments.

#### ***b. Code-Switching as Strategic Cultural Alignment***

In the hybrid public speaking classroom, code-switching isn't seen as a sign of incompetence but rather as a strategy of cultural alignment. Students consciously switch between English and Indonesian to maintain connection with the audience, clarify meaning, or build solidarity. This shift often occurs when an idea seems too abstract or when the audience's response is ambiguous. Thus, code-switching functions as a tool for relational negotiation, not simply linguistic compensation.

In one face-to-face session, P9 explained the concept of digital minimalism quite fluently in English. However, when he saw some of his classmates looking confused, he said:

“So, digital minimalism *itu sebenarnya gaya hidup yang... ya, kita lebih selektif pakai social media, nggak semua harus kita konsumsi.*”

After that, there were several nods and a brief comment, “Oh, yeah, yeah.” He then switched back to English:

“So it's about being intentional with your online behavior.”

This language shift wasn't spontaneous and directionless, but rather a response to the dynamics of collective understanding.

In the online session, a similar pattern emerged through chat. When P3 explained the issue of body positivity, one participant wrote:

*"Maksudnya self-acceptance gitu ya?"*

P3 responded verbally:

*"Yes, self-acceptance, menerima diri sendiri apa adanya."*

Here, bilingual articulation expands the space of meaning and strengthens a sense of community. These findings suggest that ICC is achieved through the ability to flexibly orchestrate semiotic resources, in which code-switching becomes a strategic practice for negotiating closeness, legitimacy, and shared understanding in a fluid intercultural context.

### *c. Camera On/Off and the Politics of Visibility*

In a hybrid classroom, the decision to turn a camera on or off is not merely a technical act, but rather a meaningful practice of visibility management. The camera becomes a medium that determines who is seen, who is heard, and who controls their exposure. In this context, ICC is manifested not only in speech but also in how students manage their visual presence.

In one online session, P4 delivered a presentation with the camera off. Her voice was steady, but without visual expression. After the presentation, the lecturer asked, "Would you like to turn your camera on for the Q&A?" P4 replied,

*"I'm sorry, my connection is not very stable."*

However, in an interview, she revealed:

*"Sebenarnya saya kurang percaya diri kalau wajah saya besar di layar. Rasanya semua orang fokus lihat saya."*

Technical reasons become a veneer over the negotiation of vulnerability and self-control.

In contrast, P1 consistently turned on the camera and maintained eye contact with the screen. In one session, she said,

*"I prefer camera on because I feel more 'present'."*

This choice demonstrates a strategy of building legitimacy and credibility through visibility.

These findings demonstrate that the camera on/off is a small political practice within hybrid spaces. ICC is realized through exposure management, in which students balance

presence, evaluation, and safety when presenting themselves in technology-mediated intercultural spaces.

*d. Hybrid Participation and Fragmented Interculturality*

The hybrid classroom format resulted in asymmetrical participation patterns. On-site students tended to respond more spontaneously, while online participants often contributed via chat or waited longer before speaking. This difference in rhythm created a fragmented interculturality, in which interactions across spaces did not always flow smoothly.

During one discussion session following a presentation, an on-site student immediately raised his hand and said,

“I disagree with your argument about Western influence because...”

Meanwhile, on the Zoom screen, a chat message appeared:

“I think both cultures influence each other, actually.”

The lecturer read the comment several minutes later. This delay altered the flow of the discussion and demonstrated how online participation often remained suspended.

In an interview, P8, who mostly attended online classes, explained:

*“Kadang saya mau langsung ngomong, tapi takut overlap. Jadi saya pilih tulis di chat saja.”*

This choice was not simply a technical preference but a strategy to avoid interruptions and maintain a position in the conversation.

These findings suggest that ICC in hybrid classrooms is negotiated under conditions of fragmented participation. Intercultural competence depends not only on speaking skills but also on the ability to read the rhythms of cross-channel interactions and navigate asynchronies in technology-mediated communication practices.

The four themes above demonstrate that Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the hybrid public speaking classroom never exists as a complete and stable capacity. It emerges as a situated accomplishment that is continuously negotiated through fluency performance, code-switching, managing camera visibility, and cross-channel participation strategies. In each of these practices, students not only demonstrate language skills but also position themselves between confidence and vulnerability, between visibility and concealment, between global English speakers and members of the local community.

The hybrid classroom, with its sociomaterial ecology, demonstrates that interculturality is both fragmented and productive. Asynchronies, pauses, and shifts in rhythm are not merely obstacles but spaces where identity and legitimacy are renegotiated. Overall, these

findings confirm that ICC is better understood as a relational, embodied, and technologized process of becoming, formed in ongoing interactions, rather than possessed as a fixed competency.

### *Discussion*

The findings of this study confirm that Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the context of a hybrid public speaking classroom does not operate as a stable individual capacity, but rather as a practice of fluctuating positioning that is situationally negotiated. Through fluency performances, code-switching strategies, managing camera visibility, and the rhythm of cross-channel participation, students continuously regulate how they are heard, seen, and recognized. ICC, therefore, emerges as a situated accomplishment, something formed in the relationship between language, body, audience, and technology. The hybrid classroom is not simply a medium, but a sociomaterial ecology that actively shapes these intercultural dynamics (Aririguzoh, 2022; Ganesan & Morales, 2024; Nikolai et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2025).

These findings invite a rereading of the ICC model, which tends to position competence as an internal attribute, structured into categories such as attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In practice, competence does not exist as a ready-made tool, but rather as a process of becoming vulnerable to context, visibility, and performative expectations. Moments of self-repair, pauses, or acknowledgements of accent anxiety demonstrate that vulnerability is not the opposite of competence but an inherent part of legitimacy negotiations. Thus, ICC is more appropriately understood as a relational practice interwoven into interactions and mediated by spatial conditions (Anas et al., 2025; Chen & Wang, 2025; MacDonald, 2022; Syam et al., 2025; Taglialatela, 2024).

Furthermore, the dynamics of camera on/off and participation via chat demonstrate that visual presence and voice distribution in hybrid spaces influence who gains legitimacy. ICC, in this context, is not only about linguistic proficiency but also the ability to manage self-exposure and read the rhythms of fragmented interactions. This perspective extends the understanding of ICC into the realm of technologized interculturality, where technology becomes part of the identity-negotiation process.

These findings align with approaches that view interculturality as a dynamic, dialogical practice rather than a static encounter between two cultural entities. The notion of communication as situated interaction and identity positioning is relevant in hybrid contexts, where interactions involve visual, digital, and embodied dimensions simultaneously (Bancou, 2024; Lyons & Tagg, 2024; Senkbeil, 2025; Vanttinen, 2025). At the same time, this study complements the literature by emphasizing the importance of

interactional competence and showing that it is also influenced by spatial configuration and technological mediation.

In the context of Indonesian higher education, this research expands the discourse on ICC, which has largely been based on quantitative measures. Using a classroom ethnography approach, this research demonstrates that intercultural practices are not always reflected in scores or self-perceptions, but in small episodes that negotiate legitimacy and solidarity.

These findings have implications for public speaking pedagogy and hybrid learning. If ICC is understood as a relational practice, then classrooms need to be designed not only to enhance fluency but also to create safe conditions for the expression of vulnerability and identity experimentation. Awareness of the politics of visibility in digital spaces is also crucial, given that not all forms of participation are equally visible.

Furthermore, this study proposes a shift from ICC as a possessed competency to ICC as a continuously negotiated practice (relational, embodied, and technologized) in increasingly complex learning spaces. This study contributes to expanding intercultural communication studies toward a more sensitive understanding of the technological dimension. The hybrid classroom demonstrates that interculturality is no longer simply a meeting between cultures, but also interactions between subjects within digital networks that mediate presence and meaning.

## **Conclusion**

This research proposes a conceptual shift in understanding Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the hybrid classroom. Rather than viewing ICC as a stable set of skills inherent to individuals, the findings suggest that it is more appropriately understood as a fluctuating positioning, a relational practice continually negotiated through fluency performances, code-switching strategies, visibility management, and participation dynamics across physical and digital spaces. In the context of public speaking, linguistic legitimacy is never entirely secure; it is constructed and maintained through a balance between performativity and vulnerability. This study broadens the horizon of intercultural communication studies toward a more sensitive understanding of technological mediation and the politics of presence. The classroom ethnography approach allows for a reading of ICC as a situated accomplishment that is not always visible in quantitative measurements but rather revealed in subtle episodes of interaction. Understanding ICC as a relational, embodied, and technologized process of becoming opens space for more reflective pedagogy and research, in which interculturality is not a final goal to be achieved but a

practice continuously being formed in the encounter among humans, language, and technology.

Further research can expand the understanding of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in hybrid classrooms by exploring variations in disciplinary contexts, technological configurations, and the role of pedagogical design in shaping identity negotiation practices. Longitudinal studies are also needed to explore how ICC as a situated accomplishment develops over time as students become more accustomed to the dynamics of technology-mediated interaction. In practice, teaching EFL public speaking in hybrid environments should not only emphasize fluency but also consciously design pedagogical spaces that enable safe vulnerability, identity reflection, and flexible use of semiotic resources, such as code-switching, chat participation, and managing camera visibility. Hybrid classrooms can function not simply as a learning format but as an intercultural learning ecology that actively facilitates the formation of reflective, dialogic, and contextual communication practices.

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