

The Importance of Building Communication Awareness as an Effort for Sustainable Conflict Resolution in West Kalimantan

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Abstract. This article stems from the social gap felt by the Chinese ethnic community in a multiethnic environment, which requires them to be able to blend in and interact with each other. As multicultural ethnic life requires them to understand and establish social relationships with each other, communication awareness becomes an important aspect in preventing conflicts that often arise due to misunderstandings among the multiethnic community. This study aims to analyze the community's communication practices among ethnic groups as an effort to bridge and overcome social gaps post-conflict. The research was conducted using ethnographic methodology to reveal facts by employing observation, interviews, and documentation to gather data. The research informants were 12 individuals, consisting of four Chinese ethnic members and eight local community members. The results reveal that the Chinese ethnic group has implemented several strategies to build communication awareness when interacting with the diverse local community. These strategies include self-awareness of diversity values, building genuine tolerance in the community, the readiness and willingness to engage in open communication, and being good listeners.

Keywords: *Indonesia; Conflict; Communication*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, which has earned its reputation as a multicultural nation (Arifin et al., 2017). This diversity can potentially trigger conflicts among ethnic groups (Akhmadi, 2019). This is due to the fact that within diversity, there are always individual differences that lead to varying understandings. These differences can result in social gaps that ultimately lead to inevitable conflicts (Wahyudi, 2019). The occurrence of such gaps is due to differences

in interests, goals, or priorities among individuals, groups, or organizations, or a mismatch with task requirements, actions, or processes. Essentially, conflicts arise when there are serious differences in beliefs, interests, and perceptions between two or more parties (Osei-Kyei et al., 2019).

This social gap is felt by the ethnic Chinese community living in a multicultural society. According to Robert Chambers, all phenomena that occur in societal layers are caused by differences that create social gaps. The ethnic Chinese community has

experienced discriminatory treatment and dislike from the local community, which has sparked racial conflicts that disrupt the long-standing social relationships between the local and ethnic Chinese communities (Juwanda, 2019). As a result, the Chinese community has to undergo a process of assimilation by building social interactions with the local community to achieve harmonious living with the local population. Actually, the process of assimilation through social interaction undertaken by the Chinese community in Indonesia has been established; however, it is still rigid because their residential areas tend to be exclusive and distinct from the majority (Arisman et al., 2015). Therefore, they become cautious and only interact with each other.

The differences in views and perspectives arise from ineffective communication, where someone with ineffective communication can create various misunderstandings that lead to conflict (Andjani, 2014). Regarding conflicts caused by ineffective communication, there have been cases in society. As research by (Androfo et al., 2020) showed, the Dayak and Madurese ethnic groups experienced conflict due to misunderstandings that originated from incorrect information and communication spread through social media. Not only the Dayak and Madurese ethnic groups, but the Chinese ethnic group also experienced conflict caused by ineffective communication. In 1967 and 1996, for instance, conflicts occurred

between the Chinese and Pandhalungan ethnic groups in Situbondo, leading to riots and negative treatment of the Chinese ethnic group by the local community (Juditha, 2015). In West Kalimantan, conflicts between ethnic groups occurred seven times, starting in 1952 in Semalantan, 1968 and 1976 in Sungai Pinyuh, 1977 in Singkawang, 1983 in Sungai Ambawang, 1993 in Kota Pontianak, 1996 in Sanggau Ledo, and in Sambas in 1999 (Cahyono et al., 2008). Given these problems, the author is interested in investigating this topic further. The author also found that in several regions in Indonesia, the lives of the Chinese community are still complicated in building communication with different ethnic groups in the Pontianak area.

Due to the issue of conflict causing social disparity among ethnic communities, it is necessary to conduct studies to address the problem. Therefore, it is important for researchers to focus on communication awareness in preventing conflicts that persist among multiethnic communities. Additionally, this issue has received insufficient attention from other researchers (Sumaya, 2020). Study on identity in conflict by mapping conflict-prone areas in West Kalimantan is an example. This could occur due to communication barriers or a lack of awareness to communicate, as (Paramita & Carrisa, 2017) study revealed that interethnic conflict can arise due to a lack of openness in dealing with differences, and communication

being the main cause of conflict. Based on previous research and field observations, this article aims to bridge the gap between the problem and the research conducted. The researcher conducts a study on communication awareness in the community's efforts to prevent sustained conflicts among the people. The researcher hopes to gain new insights into this problem and avoid prolonged deviation between the expectations and reality in the community. The *tionghoa* community believes that conflicts can be minimized, if not resolved, if social interaction is done well. Collaboration and cross-ethnic communication often prevent conflict and build positive patterns of thought in a multicultural society. In some literature on social relationships and interactions, cases of conflict between the Chinese community and local residents are transformed from multiculturalism theory derived from active participation of the community into preventive actions to avoid conflicts from recurring (Tarihoran, 2016). The article also explores the strategies of multicultural communities in building communication awareness in the multiethnic community environment as an effort to prevent and resolve conflicts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the communication awareness of the Chinese ethnic group towards the local community in efforts to resolve ongoing conflicts. The qualitative approach

consists of philosophical thinking, strategies, data collection methods, data analysis, and data interpretation that are more diverse compared to quantitative research (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, this study uses the contemporary ethnography model proposed by (Spradley, 2016), which states that contemporary ethnography should be able to create a problem-solving work so that its implications can be seen. For example, in a cultural study mentioned by (Barker, 2005) this contemporary study uses three approaches, namely (a) culturalist approach that emphasizes 'real experiences'; (b) a set of textual approaches, and (c) a series of reception studies, which have eclectic theoretical roots.

Participant

The research participants involved three community groups: Chinese, Malay, and Madurese. Malay and Madurese were selected to represent the local community. This research was conducted in Siantan Tengah sub-district, Pontianak, West Kalimantan. The researcher used purposive sampling technique to determine the source of informant data (Rutten & Soetaert, 2013). Participants or informant data were taken from three ethnic groups, namely Chinese, Madurese, and Malay, because they have experienced previous conflicts.

Data collection

The data collection method was carried out through field observation and structured

interviews focused on the daily lives of the informants. The interview questions for the Chinese ethnic community were related to their strategies, behavior, and activities in social interactions. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian and Malay. As an effort by the researcher to understand the life of the community or social situation, in-depth interviews were conducted with in-depth study (Steven J. Taylor, 2015). The collected data was then reduced, summarized, and the main points were selected, focusing on crucial aspects.

Data analysis

The researcher conducted a systematic search and organization of data obtained from observation, structured interviews, and documentation by organizing the data into categories, describing it into units, synthesizing, pattern-making, selecting the important ones to be studied, and drawing conclusions so that the researcher and others can understand it well. After all data were collected, the researcher analyzed it to validate it or also called triangulation (Denzin, 2009). his triangulation is used because each technique has its own strengths and weaknesses. Data analysis can take the form of interpreting textual and visual data (Creswell, 2015).

The data analysis technique used in this study is the Interactive Model. This interactive model consists of three main things as stated by (Matthew B. Miles, 2014) that in qualitative

research, there are three paths in analyzing data: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

DISCUSSION

Communication as an Effort to Establish Social Relations

The community in Siantan Tengah is seen to be active in communicating among ethnicities. The researcher observed that the community engaged in casual conversation in front of a Chinese ethnic house during the evening. They communicate not only to interact in terms of cooperation, trade, but also as a way to maintain the brotherhood ties among ethnic groups in order to create unity that makes social relationships harmonious. Communication serves as a component of civilization, social control, value socialization, and expression of human identity. By communicating, the community is more open to accepting differences, thus avoiding conflicts based on cultural or background differences. In addition, by communicating, the community in Pontianak can control their social actions or behaviors because they understand that their identities are different, so it takes generosity to accept and understand those differences.

Conflicts stem from ineffective communication

Good relationships can easily deteriorate if there are misunderstandings among the parties involved. The reason for

these misunderstandings is usually poor and ineffective communication, and therefore, good relationships are not always good, depending on how the involved parties communicate. Conflict is an inevitable part of any relationship, and maneuvering through interpersonal conflicts is a skill that everyone must learn (In et al., 1996).

Most causes of conflict are attributed to poor communication, meaning when communication between parties does not succeed, it becomes the main cause of conflict (Osei-Kyei et al., 2019). Conflict can broadly be conceptualized as a dynamic interactional relationship between people who feel unequal and are trying to achieve goals and solutions (Jailani et al., 2021). Conflict shows that individuals or groups perceive themselves as different, whether it is about interests, resources, opinions, values, or practices between them and others (Kugler & Brodbeck, 2014) and these differences often lead to misunderstandings. Thus, it can be concluded that communication can be the root cause of conflicts that result in unfavorable interactions among the parties involved.

The urgency of building communication awareness as an effort to resolve conflicts

Besides being the primary source of conflict, communication also becomes the best solution to resolve conflicts. Why is that? Because something caused by the initial cause, such as miscommunication that causes

misunderstandings, must be resolved and clarified through communication so that the root of the problem can be resolved well without involving violence. We need to realize that most conflict resolution processes always involve communication between opposing parties, where talking to each other is a simple, inexpensive, and ubiquitous tool for reconciling conflicts (Eisenkopf, 2018). Communication is a pattern consisting of a sequence of influence and information that lays the foundation for aligning positions, involved parties in making concessions, and developing highly beneficial mutually agreed upon solutions for conflicting parties, where the conflict itself can be likened to a dance where involved parties need to understand the rhythm of movements, adapt to their partner's movements, and treat communication as a give-and-take system rather than a set of tactics (Paul et al., 2016).

Communication is crucial in social conflicts because without it, social conflicts may escalate into violence. However, after a process of communication, conflicts can decrease into resolution and reconciliation, and can lead to a clearer definition of opposing positions (Hindman, 2015). Social conflict theory experts tend to view all history as a result of various groups fighting to control scarce resources. As long as humans continue to interact, communication as the primary expression of social conflict will continue to be an important field. Social conflict theory

experts tend to view all history as a result of various groups fighting to control scarce resources. As long as humans continue to interact, communication as the primary expression of social conflict will continue to be an important field. The form of communication process can be in the form of negotiation, where parties involved engage in direct dialogue and consultation to resolve conflicting issues. Negotiation is generally the first step in conflict resolution, usually preferred as it offers opportunities for peaceful conflict resolution. In addition, negotiation can maintain working relationships and strengthen ties between parties.

Negotiation, as a communication process, is the best conflict resolution tool because it is less expensive and less formal than other methods. However, as mentioned, the outcome of negotiation in the form of a final decision or agreement is not legally binding and this is one of the main weaknesses. This means that parties can choose not to comply with the final agreement, and also, the decision of the negotiation cannot be enforced by the court (Osei-Kyei et al., 2019). Mediation is similar to negotiation, but in this case, a mediator is appointed to guide the discussion between the parties so that a mutually agreed-upon solution can be reached. The mediator is usually a neutral person who does not have the authority to impose a resolution.

The form of communication can be in the form of negotiation. Negotiation is where the parties involved engage in dialogue and direct consultation to resolve conflicting issues. Generally, negotiation is the first step in resolving conflicts, as it offers the opportunity for peaceful conflict resolution (In et al., 1996). In addition, negotiation can maintain work relationships and strengthen bonds between parties. Negotiation is the best conflict resolution tool because it is cheaper and does not involve formal processes compared to other methods (Paul et al., 2016). However, the outcome of negotiation is not legally binding, and this is one of its main weaknesses. Mediation is similar to negotiation, but in this case, a mediator is appointed to guide the discussions of the parties so that a mutually agreed-upon solution can be reached. The mediator is usually a neutral person who does not have the authority to impose a settlement (Heitler, 2012). Communication can be a catalyst for conflict, but conversely, it can also be a tool for resolving conflict (Tsai et al., 2013). One important skill that humans must master is effective communication. Therefore, the ability to communicate well should enable a person to resolve conflicts more smoothly and effectively. Communication is important as a means for human understanding and for changing in ways not done before (Tommy & Oetzel, 2019). Communication begins with information-sharing, and a cooperative

communicator offers their thoughts from a partner's perspective, not as an enemy. The speaking skill referred to is conveying a cooperative attitude. In addition, communication should include ways to enhance independent thinking. When communicating, the morality and legality of issues always go hand-in-hand in upholding and maintaining contracts or social norms implied in interactions. This means that in communication, morality must be upheld to achieve agreement in conflict resolution, so that the resulting relationship can lead to closer, sustained relationships in the future (Paul et al., 2016).

Next is when looking at cultural conflict, we can start by assuming that communication and culture are closely intertwined, and further that their relationship can be studied through ethnographic theory and methodology. This brings with it some assumptions such as: (1) communication is a practice and process that is located to shape social life; (2) communication occurs in distinctive ways within cultural scenes and communities; (3) ethnographic studies of the social situation and community where communication occurs can reveal cultural features in communication behavior (Carbaugh, 2015). Cultural conflicts are usually caused by gaps faced by people who feel they are different in terms of culture, language, environment, and customs from the local community because the core of conflict

is a problem caused by perceived inequality (Jailani et al., 2021). To resolve such conflicts, negotiation can be used as a communication process where cross-cultural conflicts and negotiations can benefit from shifting the focus from the immediate fruits of culture and communication to the underlying culture and communication that are truly distant (Van de Vliert & Conway, 2019).

Communication is crucial in understanding and dealing with these difficult-to-solve conflicts. It is an element of conflict, in which micro-level interactions shape the behavior and actors in unresolved conflicts to think about the communication process. They strategize, discuss, and manipulate symbols, all in an effort to control others and define themselves (Arquitectura et al., 2015 dalam Ellis, 2019). The most basic communication theory for conflict management is effective intergroup conflict resolution that implies significant changes in the way members of different communities and groups interact with each other. This means that where there is conflict, how individuals communicate their conflicts (i.e., conflict communication behavior) may be crucial to whether conflict is minimized or escalated (Ayoko et al., 2021). Based on what has been discussed regarding the importance of communication in a diverse society, there are several ways to build communication awareness in the community.

Familiarize yourself with the value of diversity

The multiethnic society in Pontianak has recognized the value of diversity among its surrounding communities, allowing them to freely practice their own cultures and traditions that are believed and trusted by each ethnicity. In the case of the conflict that occurred in Pontianak in 2019, which was based on religion and ethnicity, the issue was quickly and effectively resolved through a communal approach facilitated by the police and the traditional leaders of each ethnic group. This shows that the community has built awareness for communication by starting with self-recognition and understanding the value of diversity. This means that we must realize that we live in a diverse society and must accept these differences. If someone tends towards negative ethnocentrism, it will hinder the success of intercultural communication. Each culture has its own uniqueness and distinctive characteristics, "different language, different world" (Luthfia, 2014).

Build a real attitude of tolerance in society

The acceptance of diversity in society has been acknowledged, and the next step is to build a genuine attitude of tolerance in the community. The multi-ethnic community in the Pontianak area is very strong in its tolerance, not only in behavior but also in the coexistence of their places of worship. The attitude of tolerance is related to moral

behavior. This is in line with the opinion of Joseph et al. (2009, as cited in Jailani et al., 2021), who stated that moral behavior can control the freedom and egoism of individuals in their actions, as well as control the social life of the community.

There is a readiness and a desire for open communication

The readiness and willingness to engage in communication is evident when the community engages in discussions in the front yard or in shops owned by the community. They consciously approach one another and initiate conversations about their daily lives, including work issues, household matters, and even social issues occurring in Indonesia.

Can be a good listener

Active listening ability is defined as a process of understanding to actively obtain information and is a speaker's attitude to objectively understand the conversation. To establish effective communication, we should at least: (1) emphasize communication, (2) keep promises or commitments that have been made, (3) explain plans or expectations related to what will be done, (4) sincerely apologize when mistakes are made, (5) show personal integrity.

CONCLUSION

The awareness of communication in a multicultural community is important in building social relations to create unity and a harmonious life after a conflict. As

demonstrated by the multi-ethnic community in Siantan Tengah, Pontianak, their strong awareness of communication has resulted in a harmonious life. This awareness of communication is practiced through moral behavior, such as showing tolerance, understanding, and valuing diversity. These positive values distinguish the multi-ethnic community in Siantan Tengah, Pontianak, from other communities. The efforts made by the multi-ethnic community in Siantan Tengah, Pontianak, to build communication awareness for the sake of post-conflict harmony can serve as an example for other communities in building social relations among people.

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