Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 3, 413-437
http://dx.doi.org/10.66815/ejecs/2947

Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

Negotiating Social Cohesion in Multicultural Urban Indonesia: Interaction and Adaptation

Syamsidar Syamsidar[1], Rusdiah Rusdiah, and Wahyuni Wahyuni
Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Makassar, Indonesia

Awaluddin Syamsu
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, USA

Abstract: Continuous interactions among diverse ethnic and cultural groups shape multicultural cities. Social cohesion is thus a negotiated and relational outcome. This study conceptualizes cohesion as emerging from everyday interaction and adaptive social practices, rather than as a product of formal integration. It examines the roles of intercultural communication and social adaptation in shaping social cohesion and ethnic relations in an urban Indonesian context. Using survey data from 206 residents in Makassar, Indonesia, the study employs PLS-SEM to analyse relationships among intercultural communication, social adaptation, social cohesion, and community-based engagement. The model explains 72.9% of the variance in social cohesion and 82.7% of the variance in community-based engagement, indicating strong explanatory capacity. Intercultural communication is positively associated with both social cohesion and community engagement, while social adaptation demonstrates a substantially stronger association with social cohesion. This highlights the central role of adaptation in embedding intercultural experiences in shared norms over time. The results reveal differentiated pathways linking intercultural processes to engagement. Social cohesion mediates the relationship between social adaptation and community engagement, but does not mediate the relationship between intercultural communication and engagement. This finding indicates that participation may emerge through both pragmatic interactional coordination and cohesion-based relational processes. Social cohesion functions as a contingent rather than universal mediating mechanism, distinguishing between interactional effectiveness and longer-term adaptive integration in multicultural urban contexts. These findings provide a refined process-oriented framework for understanding how multicultural coexistence can be sustained through differentiated interactional and adaptive mechanisms.

[1] Corresponding Author: Associate Professor of Sociolinguistics, Faculty of English Literature, Communication and Education, Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Jalan Urip Sumoharjo Km. 5, Makassar 90231, Indonesia. E-Mail: syamsidar.syamsidar@umi.ac.id
Copyright © 2026 by Author/s and Licensed by CECS Publications, United States. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, Social adaptation, Social cohesion, Community engagement, Multicultural cities

Sustained encounters among diverse ethnic and cultural groups are increasingly shaping multicultural cities worldwide. In such contexts, social cohesion is not predetermined, and acts as a relational outcome negotiated through everyday interaction. Rather than treating cohesion as a static product of diversity management, this study adopts a process-oriented perspective emphasizing interaction and adaptive social practices. Ethnic and cultural diversity creates opportunities for exchange, while also generating challenges related to communication, trust, belonging, and participation (Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023; Schefers, 2026; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). These dynamics reflect forms of "everyday multiculturalism" in which social relations are shaped through routine interaction rather than formal policy frameworks (Wise & Velayutham, 2009). Consequently, understanding how diverse urban communities sustain functional cohesion is a vital goal.

Social cohesion is better understood as an emergent relational process rather than a fixed condition. It develops through repeated encounters among individuals with different backgrounds, where diversity reconfigures trust, belonging, and engagement in context-dependent ways (Beugelsdijk & Klasing, 2016; Putnam, 2007; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). This perspective is particularly relevant in urban environments, where cohesion is often sustained through informal interaction rather than formal institutional mechanisms (Luo et al., 2023). Recent scholarship accordingly conceptualizes cohesion as a negotiated outcome grounded in interaction and adaptive practices (Dielini et al., 2022; Holliday, 2022; Nesterova & Kim, 2024), in which belonging itself is defined in terms of a socially constructed process shaped by inclusion, exclusion, and boundary negotiation (Allen et al., 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Intercultural communication plays a key role in this process. Openness, accommodation, and cultural sensitivity enable individuals to manage uncertainty and coordinate action across ethnic boundaries (Harwood, 2020; Kecskes, 2023; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022). While communication facilitates cooperation, it does not necessarily produce durable cohesion, as interactional effectiveness may support coordination without generating sustained trust. Its impact therefore depends on contextual and relational conditions (Watters et al., 2020; Ward et al., 2021; Yoon et al., 2023), and is often accompanied by misunderstandings and asymmetries in diverse urban settings (Yang et al., 2025).

In addition, social adaptation represents a longer-term mechanism stabilizing ethnic relations. This refers to processes through which individuals adjust behaviours and expectations in response to sustained diversity (Cormoș, 2022; Döbler & Carbon, 2023; Huff et al., 2021). Unlike momentary accommodation, adaptation reflects the gradual incorporation of intercultural experiences into shared norms over time (Berry, 2023), enabling more predictable and cooperative relationships across ethnic boundaries. Extant research in this area typically examines communication, adaptation, and cohesion separately or assumes linear relationships among them. Moreover, focus generally fixes on Western or migration-driven contexts, with limited attention to how these processes jointly shape both relational (cohesion) and behavioural (engagement) outcomes. This gap is particularly evident in Global South cities, in which diversity is often historically embedded and negotiated through informal practices (Holliday, 2022; Ricks, 2022).

Indonesia provides an important context for addressing this gap, as it has historically managed diversity through everyday interactions, rather than formal multicultural policies (Hoon, 2017; Mansouri & Elias, 2021). Urban centres such as Makassar demonstrate this pattern, as

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 3, 413-437
http://dx.doi.org/10.66815/ejecs/2947
Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

diverse groups coexist through routine interaction shaped by both cooperation and historically embedded tensions (Bilven et al., 2022; Pattipeilhy & Paramasatya, 2022). These conditions highlight cohesion as a negotiated process. This study investigates the interplay between intercultural communication and social adaptation in shaping social cohesion and community-based engagement. Rather than proposing a new theory, it refines existing frameworks by examining how these processes operate through differentiated relational pathways. Using a structural model integrating communication, adaptation, cohesion, and engagement, the study addresses three questions:

1. How do intercultural communication and social adaptation influence perceptions of social cohesion?
2. To what extent do these processes shape community-based engagement?
3. How does social cohesion function as a relational mechanism linking intercultural practices to participation?

The study makes three contributions. First, it distinguishes intercultural communication and social adaptation as analytically distinct yet interconnected processes operating at different temporal levels. Second, it demonstrates that social cohesion functions as a contingent, rather than universal, mediating mechanism. Third, by focusing on the urban Indonesian context, it extends scholarship beyond Western-centric frameworks, and demonstrates how cohesion can be negotiated through everyday interaction and adaptive practices.

Literature Review

Intercultural Communication and Ethnic Relations in Multicultural Cities

Intercultural communication has long been recognised as a central mechanism for managing ethnic and cultural relations. Earlier approaches conceptualised interactions between bounded cultural groups, treating cultural differences as relatively stable attributes shaping communication outcomes (Piller, 2021). More recent scholarship has adopted a relational and processual perspective, emphasizing communication as context-dependent and dynamically negotiated in social interaction (Allwood, 2023; Holliday, 2022; Kecskes, 2023). In this view, intercultural communication is a socially embedded practice shaped by relational and structural conditions, rather than mere technical competence (Dervin & Gross, 2023; Wise & Velayutham, 2009).

According to social identity theory, perceptions of group membership shape communication across ethnic boundaries (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Verkuyten, 2018). Individuals interpret communicative behaviour through categorization processes which influence trust, belonging, and cooperation (Allen et al., 2021). Boundary-making perspectives further emphasize that ethnic relations are produced and reproduced through everyday interaction, positioning communication as a site where social boundaries are negotiated (Brubaker, 2006; Wimmer, 2013). Empirical research has confirmed that intergroup communication shapes perceptions of inclusion and cooperation in diverse contexts (Watters et al., 2020; Yoon et al., 2023; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021).

In multicultural settings, communicative practices such as accommodation, alignment, and perspective-taking enable coordination across ethnic boundaries (Harwood, 2020; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022). Communication accommodation theory explains how behavioural adjustments reduce social distance and signal relational openness. However, intercultural interaction often

exhibits asymmetries and misunderstandings, particularly in the context of linguistically and culturally diverse environments (Yang et al., 2025), reflecting the deeper structural inequalities which shape communicative expectations and outcomes (Beugelsdijk & Klasing, 2016).

Despite its importance, effective communication does not necessarily lead to sustained social cohesion. Asymmetrical power relations and historically embedded inequalities shape interaction, limiting the capacity of communicative competence alone to foster durable trust and collaboration (Holliday, 2022; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022). Communication primarily enables coordination and coexistence rather than deeper relational integration (Cormoș, 2022; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011). Recent scholarship emphasizes the contextual and reflexive nature of communication, highlighting its embeddedness within broader social structures and power dynamics (Dervin & Gross, 2023; Guo, 2025). Its effects therefore depend not only on interactional dynamics but also on structural conditions. This is particularly relevant in Global South contexts, in which diversity is negotiated through everyday practices rather than formal institutional arrangements (Ricks, 2022).

While intercultural communication enables interaction across difference, its contribution to social cohesion is neither uniform nor automatic. Its durability depends on how communicative experiences are embedded within broader processes of belonging and relational negotiation (Dielini et al., 2022; Yuval-Davis, 2011), highlighting the need for complementary mechanisms such as longer-term social adaptation.

Social Adaptation as a Relational Process in Ethnically Diverse Contexts

Social adaptation refers to the longer-term processes through which individuals adjust behaviours, expectations, and social practices in response to sustained cultural diversity (Cormoș, 2022; Döbler & Carbon, 2023; Huff et al., 2021). Whereas intercultural communication operates at the level of immediate interaction, adaptation captures cumulative processes through which individuals develop more stable patterns of behaviour across repeated encounters. Rather than momentary accommodation, it reflects ongoing learning that stabilizes social relations by aligning practices with evolving social norms.

Contemporary research emphasizes that adaptation should not be equated with assimilation into a dominant culture. Instead, it is understood as a reciprocal and context-dependent process of negotiated alignment that enables participation in collective life while maintaining cultural distinctiveness (Berry, 2023). This perspective reflects a shift from assimilationist frameworks toward pluralistic and interaction-oriented interpretations of coexistence. Adaptation entails flexibility and negotiated behavioural modification, rather than convergence (Döbler & Carbon, 2023).

Empirical evidence shows that adaptive capacities are associated with increased trust, reduced uncertainty, and greater willingness to engage across ethnic boundaries (Beugelsdijk & Klasing, 2016; Ward et al., 2021). Through repeated interaction, individuals develop more predictable expectations and behavioural coordination, transforming episodic encounters into more durable relational patterns that support everyday coexistence. Importantly, adaptation operates in conjunction with, but at a different level from, communicative processes. Intercultural communication facilitates initial engagement across difference, whereas adaptation reflects the internalization of these experiences into enduring behavioural orientations (Döbler & Carbon, 2023). This distinction highlights their temporal divergence: communication enables immediate coordination, while adaptation sustains relational continuity over time. Social cohesion in

Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

multicultural urban settings depends on how short-term interactional practices become embedded in longer-term adaptive processes. In this way, intercultural experiences are stabilised into shared expectations and social routines (Dielini et al., 2022).

Social Cohesion as a Negotiated Outcome of Ethnic Relations

Social cohesion is central to research on ethnic and cultural relations and is commonly associated with trust, belonging, shared norms, and social connectedness across group boundaries (Allen et al., 2021; Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023). Rather than representing a single outcome, social cohesion has been conceptualised as a multidimensional construct incorporating attitudinal, relational, and behavioural dimensions, including trust, belonging, participation, and norm adherence (Foo, 2023; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). In sociological and policy debates, however, it is often treated as an outcome of successful integration or diversity management (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Putnam, 2007). Such perspectives overlook the everyday relational processes through which cohesion is actively produced and sustained.

Recent scholarship reconceptualizes social cohesion as a relational and processual accomplishment rather than a static condition (Nesterova & Kim, 2024). From this viewpoint, cohesion arises from recurrent interactions, practical collaboration, and flexible social practices among heterogeneous groups. This does not imply the absence of conflict, but rather the capacity to sustain workable social relations amid diversity and historical tension (Holliday, 2022). In this sense, cohesion functions as a relational framework that enables trust and cooperation beyond immediate group boundaries (Portes & Vickstrom, 2011; Uslaner, 2002). Within this framework, intercultural communication contributes to cohesion by shaping the interactional dynamics of everyday encounters. Openness, accommodation, and perspective-taking facilitate cooperation across ethnic boundaries (Kecskes, 2023; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022). However, these effects are often situational and may not translate into durable or generalised trust, particularly in contexts shaped by structural inequalities, such as socioeconomic disparities or historically embedded tensions between groups (Beugelsdijk & Klasing, 2016).

Social adaptation addresses this limitation by embedding communicative experiences into shared norms and expectations that stabilize social relations over time (Berry, 2023; Cormoş, 2022; Döbler & Carbon, 2023). Through cumulative adjustment, individuals may develop consistent interaction patterns that reinforce trust, belonging, and relational continuity. Cohesion can therefore be understood as the outcome of interactional and adaptive processes operating across different temporal scales.

Social cohesion serves not only as an outcome, but also as a relational mechanism that connects interpersonal interactions to collective outcomes, such as community participation and engagement (Bolaji & Imonitie, 2025; Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023). Cohesive communities are more likely to sustain cooperation and collective action, as shared expectations and trust encourage participation across ethnic boundaries (Portes & Vickstrom, 2011; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). However, research examining how interactional and adaptive processes jointly produce cohesion and engagement within a unified analytical framework remains limited, particularly in Global South urban contexts. This gap underscores the need to conceptualize cohesion as both an emergent and mediating process within everyday multicultural interaction (Dielini et al., 2022).

Analytical Implications for the Present Study

The literature reviewed above positions intercultural communication, social adaptation, and social cohesion as interrelated processes which shape ethnic relations in multicultural urban environments. However, previous studies have predominantly focused on macro-level conditions and generalised trust dynamics, with limited attention to the micro-level interactional processes through which cohesion is negotiated in everyday life (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Dielini et al., 2022; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011; Putnam, 2007).

In addition, intercultural communication and social adaptation are typically examined in isolation. They may emphasize either interactional competence or adaptive adjustment, without explaining how these processes jointly shape relational and behavioural outcomes, including social cohesion and community-based engagement (Berry, 2023; Holliday, 2022; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022). As a result, their combined effects remain insufficiently theorised and empirically specified, particularly in contexts where diversity is historically embedded and negotiated through everyday practices, rather than formal institutional arrangements (Ricks, 2022).

This study addresses this gap by advancing a process-oriented framework that integrates interactional and adaptive mechanisms across different temporal scales. Intercultural communication is conceptualised as enabling immediate coordination across ethnic boundaries, whereas social adaptation stabilizes expectations and relationships over time (Cormoș, 2022). This distinction then clarifies how these processes jointly produce relational outcomes, rather than operating through linear or uniform pathways. Within this framework, social cohesion has been reconceptualised as a relational mechanism linking everyday intercultural processes to community-based engagement (Allen et al., 2021; Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023). By examining how communication and adaptation differentially influence cohesion and how cohesion, in turn, shapes engagement, the study identifies the mechanisms through which multicultural communities sustain cooperation under conditions of diversity.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

This study conceptualizes intercultural communication, social adaptation, and social cohesion as distinct yet interconnected processes shaping ethnic relations in multicultural urban contexts. Building on scholarship on diversity, trust, and boundary formation (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Brubaker, 2006; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011), the framework focuses on micro-level relational mechanisms through which everyday interaction contributes to social cohesion. Rather than assuming linear relationships, differentiated but complementary roles are found across processes, with cohesion understood as a negotiated relational outcome emerging from ongoing interaction and adaptation.

Within this framework, intercultural communication and social adaptation operate at different temporal levels. Intercultural communication refers to interactional processes which enable coordination and uncertainty reduction in everyday encounters, including openness, accommodation, and perspective-taking (Holliday, 2022; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022). Social adaptation, by contrast, reflects cumulative behavioural adjustment and norm alignment developed through repeated exposure to diversity (Berry, 2023; Huff et al., 2021). While communication facilitates situational coordination, adaptation stabilizes expectations and behaviours over time,

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 3, 413-437
http://dx.doi.org/10.66815/ejecs/2947
Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

embedding intercultural experiences into shared practices supporting social cohesion and collective engagement.

Social cohesion emerges as a relational outcome of these processes and functions as a connective mechanism linking interaction to collective engagement. In line with relational perspectives (Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023), cohesion is defined as a framework of trust, belonging, and shared norms that facilitates cooperation across ethnic boundaries. In this study, cohesion has been positioned as an intermediary mechanism translating interactional and adaptive processes into collective outcomes.

By distinguishing between interactional and adaptive mechanisms, such a framework enables the examination of differentiated pathways through which ethnic relations are negotiated. Intercultural communication is expected to enhance situational cooperation, whereas social adaptation contributes to the long-term stabilization of trust and shared norms. Accordingly, communication may enable cooperation without deep relational integration, whereas adaptation supports more durable cohesion. These processes are therefore expected to influence social cohesion through complementary pathways, with cohesion serving as a relational conduit to community-based engagement. This framework provides the basis for examining both direct and indirect relationships among intercultural communication, social adaptation, social cohesion, and community-based engagement. This further enables the identification of multiple relational pathways, rather than uniform effects.

Intercultural Communication and Social Cohesion

Intercultural communication facilitates interaction across ethnic boundaries by enabling coordination, reducing uncertainty, and supporting everyday encounters in diverse urban contexts (Harwood, 2020; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022; Kecskes, 2023). These interactional processes contribute to perceptions of trust, belonging, and social connectedness, which are core elements of social cohesion (Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023). However, its influence on cohesion is facilitative rather than deterministic. While communication supports cooperation and situational inclusion, it does not necessarily resolve structural inequalities or historically embedded tensions (Holliday, 2022). As a result, interactional effectiveness may enable coordination without producing durable or generalised trust (Portes & Vickstrom, 2011; Uslaner, 2002).

Empirical evidence further indicates that the effects of communication on cohesion are context-dependent (Watters et al., 2020; Yoon et al., 2023). Taken together, intercultural communication is expected to enhance social cohesion by shaping interactional conditions that support trust and inclusion, even while its effects remain situational.

H1. Intercultural communication is positively associated with social cohesion in multicultural urban communities.

Social Adaptation and Social Cohesion

Social adaptation reflects the longer-term processes through which individuals adjust behaviours, expectations, and social practices in response to sustained cultural diversity (Huff et al., 2021; Döbler & Carbon, 2023). Unlike intercultural communication, which operates at the level of immediate encounters, adaptation develops through repeated experiences that stabilize expectations and behavioural norms over time. As interactions become routinised, individuals develop more predictable patterns of coordination, reducing uncertainty and strengthening trust

across ethnic boundaries (Ward et al., 2021). These cumulative processes embed interactional experiences into more enduring relational frameworks, transforming episodic cooperation into stable patterns of interaction that underpin social cohesion (Berry, 2023; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011; Uslaner, 2002).

Adaptation more directly strengthens shared norms and long-lasting trust, which are important for cohesion, than interactional communication does. Accordingly, social adaptation is expected to have a stronger and more stable association with social cohesion.

H2. Social adaptation is positively associated with social cohesion in multicultural urban communities.

Intercultural Communication and Community-Based Engagement

Intercultural communication facilitates participation in community-based activities by enabling coordination, mutual understanding, and pragmatic cooperation across ethnic boundaries (Bibi & Hamida, 2024; David et al., 2024; Mansouri & Elias, 2021). In a multicultural setting, communicative competence allows individuals to navigate diversity and coordinate action in shared environments. Such engagement is often situational and task-oriented, relying on interactional effectiveness rather than deeply embedded relational bonds. Individuals can participate in collective activities by managing uncertainty and negotiating expectations, even in the absence of strong interpersonal trust.

Empirical evidence suggests that intercultural communication promotes participation by reducing interactional barriers and facilitating cooperation in collective initiatives (Mansouri & Elias, 2021). Importantly, this form of engagement may occur independently of strong social cohesion, as it is driven by pragmatic coordination rather than shared identity or relational integration. These arguments indicate that intercultural communication supports community-based engagement primarily through interactional coordination, rather than cohesion-based mechanisms.

H3. Intercultural communication is positively associated with community-based engagement.

Social Adaptation and Community-Based Engagement

Social adaptation supports community-based engagement by enabling individuals to navigate diverse expectations and norms over time (Ward et al., 2021). Through repeated intercultural encounters, individuals can develop behavioural flexibility that facilitates participation in activities involving diverse groups. However, compared to its role in shaping social cohesion, the influence of adaptation on engagement remains more indirect and context-dependent. Rather than directly motivating participation, adaptation reduces social friction and aligns expectations, making sustained involvement in collective activities more feasible. These effects depend on contextual conditions, including opportunities for participation and supportive relational environments. Accordingly, social adaptation contributes to engagement by enabling continued participation rather than directly driving it.

H4. Social adaptation is positively associated with community-based engagement.

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 3, 413-437
http://dx.doi.org/10.66815/ejecs/2947
Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

Social Cohesion and Community-Based Engagement

Social cohesion serves as a relational foundation for collective participation in multicultural communities. Higher levels of trust, shared norms, and social connectedness often increase individuals' willingness to engage in cooperative activities across ethnic boundaries (Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023). These conditions reduce uncertainty and foster expectations of reciprocity and facilitate sustained participation. From a sociological perspective, cohesion supports collective action by reinforcing generalised trust and shared expectations for cooperation (Uslaner, 2002; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011). When individuals perceive their communities as cohesive, they are more likely to collaborate and contribute to collective activities. In ethnically diverse contexts, cohesion extends trust beyond immediate interactions, enabling more stable and sustained forms of participation. Accordingly, social cohesion may function as a key relational mechanism linking trust to collective engagement.

H5. Social cohesion is positively associated with community-based engagement.

The Mediating Role of Social Cohesion

Intercultural communication and social adaptation may influence community-based engagement through both direct and indirect pathways. In this study, social cohesion has been conceptualised as a relational mechanism linking intercultural interaction to collective participation (Nesterova & Kim, 2024; Oviedo-Berrocal et al., 2026). Intercultural communication operates at the level of immediate interaction, enabling coordination across ethnic boundaries. Its influence on engagement is therefore expected to occur primarily through direct interactional pathways, as participation can emerge through pragmatic coordination, without necessitating strong relational cohesion. In contrast, social adaptation reflects longer-term processes through which individuals internalize intercultural experiences and align behaviour with shared norms (Berry, 2023; Huff et al., 2021). By stabilizing trust and expectations over time, adaptation is more likely to influence engagement indirectly through social cohesion. This fosters a sense of belonging and mutual understanding among individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Accordingly, intercultural communication and social adaptation are expected to exhibit differentiated indirect effects. Communication primarily supports engagement through direct mechanisms, whereas adaptation operates through cohesion-based relational pathways, suggesting that while effective communication fosters immediate participation, adaptation enhances long-term involvement by building stronger community ties. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

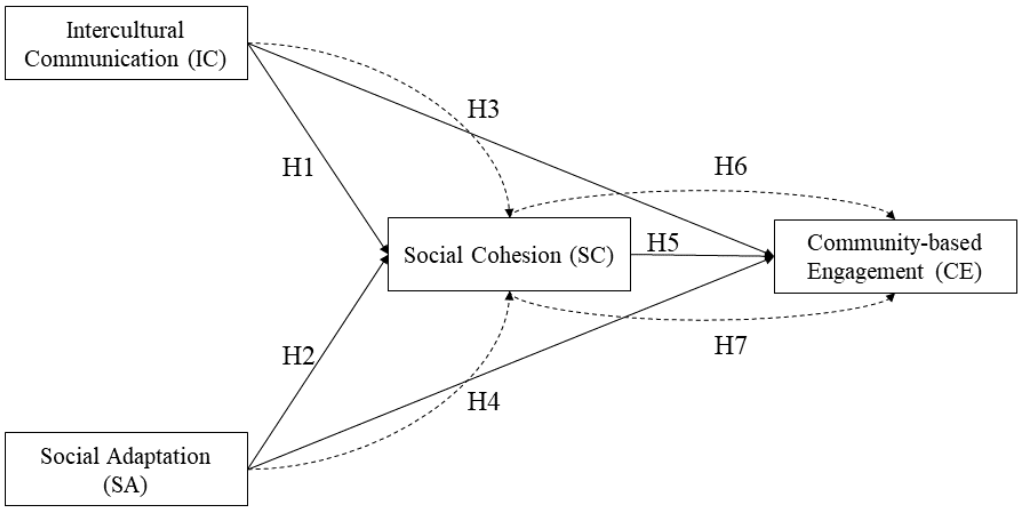
H6. Social cohesion mediates the relationship between intercultural communication and community-based engagement.

H7. Social cohesion mediates the relationship between social adaptation and community-based engagement.

This distinction highlights the coexistence of interactional and relational pathways through which engagement is produced, illustrating how both social cohesion and social adaptation contribute to community-based engagement. Figure 1 presents the analytical model.

Figure 1

Analytical Framework of Intercultural Communication, Social Adaptation, Social Cohesion, and Community-Based Engagement



Methodology

Research Design

This study has adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among intercultural communication, social adaptation, social cohesion, and community-based engagement in a multicultural urban context. The survey collects individuals' perceptions of daily intercultural interactions, facilitating the examination of relational patterns within ethnic diversity. Given the cross-sectional design, analysis focuses on associations rather than causality. These findings reveal differentiated patterns of influence across constructs. The findings have therefore been interpreted as patterns of covariation among relational processes, rather than as evidence of causality (Holliday, 2022; Mansouri & Elias, 2021).

The research design allows for the simultaneous examination of direct and indirect relationships within a unified analytical framework. These relationships have been estimated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), which is suitable for analysing complex models with latent constructs and mediation paths (Hair et al., 2021).

Research Context

The study was conducted in Makassar, a major urban centre in eastern Indonesia characterised by long-standing ethnic and cultural diversity. Historically shaped by trade and migration, the city facilitates sustained interaction among diverse groups, including Makassarese, Buginese, and Chinese Indonesians. These interactions are structured by economic interdependence and historically embedded social hierarchies, each of which shape the negotiation of ethnic relations in everyday life. In contrast to contexts governed by formal multicultural policies, intercultural interaction in Makassar occurs primarily in everyday settings such as neighbourhoods, workplaces, and community spaces. This exemplifies a type of everyday

Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

multiculturalism, through which diversity is navigated through informal social practices rather than formal institutional structures. Ethnic coexistence is therefore shaped by both routine interaction and historically embedded tensions, which coexist with cooperation (Bilven et al., 2022; Holliday, 2022).

This context offers an analytically pertinent framework for investigating social cohesion as a negotiated process. By focusing on a Global South urban environment in which diversity is historically embedded and informally governed, the study extends existing research beyond Western, policy-driven models of multiculturalism.

Participants and Data Collection

Data were collected from 206 adult residents of Makassar who reported regular interaction with individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure direct experience with everyday intercultural interaction. Data were collected through both online and paper-based questionnaires. The sample consisted of 52.9% female and 47.1% male respondents, with the majority aged 18–25 (64.5%). The most prominent ethnic groups were Makassarese (34.5%), Buginese (29.6%), and Chinese Indonesians (19.9%). A detailed demographic profile is provided in Appendix A4.

Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained prior to data collection. Responses were anonymous and confidential. The survey used a structured, self-administered questionnaire with closed-ended items. Given the use of self-reported, single-source data, common method bias cannot be fully excluded; however, anonymity and independent completion have been emphasised in order to reduce social desirability bias. The sample size has met recommended thresholds for PLS-SEM analysis involving multiple constructs and mediation paths (Hair et al., 2021). As a non-probabilistic sample, the findings are interpreted as associational patterns rather than population-level estimates.

Measures

The questionnaire assessed four constructs, namely intercultural communication, social adaptation, social cohesion, and community-based engagement. These have been operationalised as reflective latent variables measured using multiple items adapted from established instruments (Harwood, 2020; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022; Ward et al., 2021). Each construct was measured using multiple indicators (five items for intercultural communication, social adaptation, and social cohesion, and four for community-based engagement) on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = agree). The questionnaire was administered in Bahasa Indonesia. Items were translated from English and reviewed by professional translator to ensure semantic equivalence.

Intercultural communication captured openness, cultural sensitivity, and accommodative practices. Social adaptation reflected longer-term behavioural adjustment. Social cohesion assessed trust, connectedness, and shared norms. Finally, community-based engagement measured participation and collaboration in collective activities (Berry, 2023; Döbler & Carbon, 2023; Mansouri & Elias, 2021; Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023). A full list of items is provided in Appendix A1. The measurement model was evaluated for reliability and validity prior to hypothesis testing. Internal consistency exceeded recommended thresholds (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability > .70). Furthermore, convergent validity was supported (AVE > .50), and

discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios (Hair et al., 2021). The detailed results are reported in the results section and Appendix A2.

Analytical Procedure

Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS, which is suitable for complex models with latent constructs and mediation paths (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis followed a two-stage approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated for reliability and validity. Internal consistency exceeded recommended thresholds (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability > .70). Convergent validity was supported (AVE > .50), and discriminant validity was confirmed using HTMT. Multicollinearity was assessed using VIF, and all values fell within acceptable limits. Second, the structural model was assessed to test the hypothesised relationships. Path coefficients and significance were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, allowing for the evaluation of both direct and indirect effects. Model performance was assessed using R^2 and predictive relevance (Q^2), while SRMR was used as an approximate fit indicator.

The mediating role of social cohesion was examined through the significance of indirect effects. Given the cross-sectional and self-reported nature of the data, the results have been interpreted as associational rather than causal. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test and procedural remedies, with no single factor accounting for the majority of variance.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for social science research. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Responses were collected anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was recorded.

According to the research governance policies of Universitas Muslim Indonesia, formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is not required for minimal-risk, anonymous survey-based studies that do not involve vulnerable populations or sensitive personal data. Therefore, no IRB approval number was issued for this study. All procedures adhered to internationally accepted ethical principles, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Results

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was first evaluated to assess reliability and construct validity. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). All constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The values for Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.957 to 0.972, while the values for composite reliability ranged from 0.963 to 0.975. These high values indicate strong internal consistency, although they may also reflect a degree of item similarity within constructs. Each scenario is considered in the interpretation of the results.

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 3, 413-437
http://dx.doi.org/10.66815/ejecs/2947
Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE). All AVE values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that the constructs explain a substantial proportion of variance in their indicators. AVE values ranged from 0.718 to 0.749, confirming satisfactory convergent validity. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). All HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating adequate discriminant validity between intercultural communication, social adaptation, social cohesion, and community-based engagement. However, the relatively high HTMT values between intercultural communication and social adaptation suggest a conceptual proximity between these constructs, as addressed in the discussion.

Overall, the measurement model demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity, while also indicating that some constructs are closely related, reflecting the interconnected nature of intercultural processes in multicultural settings. Appendix A2 provides detailed statistics on reliability and validity.

Structural Model Results

The structural model was assessed following the evaluation of the measurement model to test the hypothesised relationships among intercultural communication, social adaptation, social cohesion, and community-based engagement. Prior to hypothesis testing, multicollinearity diagnostics were examined using the variance inflation factor (VIF). All VIF values were below the recommended threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

The structural model demonstrates substantial explanatory power. Intercultural communication and social adaptation account for a significant portion of the variance in social cohesion, whereas intercultural communication, social adaptation, and social cohesion collectively explain a large proportion of the variance in community-based engagement. Specifically, the model explains 72.9% of the variance in social cohesion ($R^2 = 0.729$) and 82.7% of the variance in community-based engagement ($R^2 = 0.827$). This indicates strong explanatory capacity for both endogenous constructs. While these values indicate high explanatory power, they should be interpreted with caution. The relatively high R^2 values may partly reflect the conceptual proximity among constructs, particularly between intercultural communication and social adaptation, which represent closely related dimensions of intercultural processes. In addition, the use of self-reported data collected through a single method may have contributed to inflated relationships due to common method variance.

Furthermore, the inclusion of theoretically interrelated constructs within a tightly specified structural model may increase shared variance in predicting endogenous variables. Intercultural communication and social adaptation can be conceptualised as sequential and complementary processes operating along a shared intercultural continuum, which may strengthen their combined explanatory power for social cohesion. Accordingly, the high R^2 values should not be interpreted as evidence of model exhaustiveness, but rather as reflecting the analytical proximity and interdependence of the constructs included in the model. Bootstrapping procedures (5,000 resamples) have been used to estimate path coefficients and evaluate statistical significance. Standardised path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values were obtained through this procedure.

The results indicate that intercultural communication and social adaptation are positively associated with social cohesion and that intercultural communication, social adaptation, and social cohesion are positively related to community-based engagement. Specifically:

1. Intercultural communication → social cohesion ($\beta = 0.284$, $t = 2.37$, $p = .019$)

2. Social adaptation → social cohesion ($\beta = 0.620$, $t = 5.51$, $p < .001$)
3. Intercultural communication → community-based engagement ($\beta = 0.364$, $t = 4.58$, $p < .001$)
4. Social adaptation → community-based engagement ($\beta = 0.206$, $t = 1.98$, $p = .049$)
5. Social cohesion → community-based engagement ($\beta = 0.414$, $t = 3.71$, $p < .001$).

These findings reveal differentiated patterns of influence across constructs. Social adaptation shows a substantially stronger association with social cohesion compared to intercultural communication, whereas intercultural communication demonstrates a relatively stronger direct association with community-based engagement.

The effect of social adaptation on community-based engagement is comparatively weaker and is only marginally significant ($p = .049$), indicating that this relationship should be interpreted cautiously. This result suggests a modest direct effect and reinforces the importance of indirect pathways, particularly those operating through social cohesion, in explaining how adaptive processes translate into sustained engagement. Table 1 provides a concise summary of the hypothesised relationships and their statistical support, allowing a clearer comparison of the direct and indirect effects across the model.

Table 1
Summary of Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	Result
H1	Intercultural Communication → Social Cohesion	Supported
H2	Social Adaptation → Social Cohesion	Supported
H3	Intercultural Communication → Community-Based Engagement	Supported
H4	Social Adaptation → Community-Based Engagement	Supported
H5	Social Cohesion → Community-Based Engagement	Supported
H6	Intercultural Communication → Social Cohesion → Community-Based Engagement	Not supported
H7	Social Adaptation → Social Cohesion → Community-Based Engagement	Supported

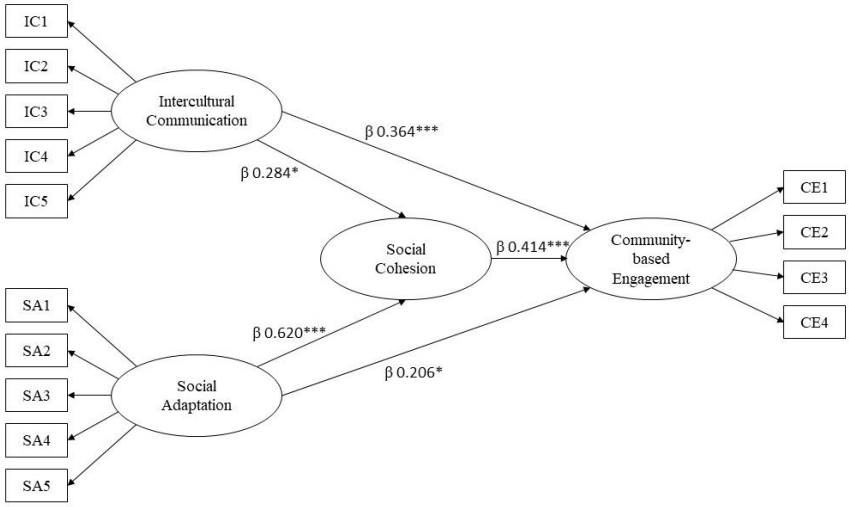
Note. The standardised path coefficients were estimated using bootstrapping in PLS-SEM. Detailed measurement and structural model statistics are reported in Appendices A2 and A3.

A visual representation of the model provides a clearer understanding of the structural relationships among the constructs, beyond the numerical summary. Figure 2 illustrates the structural model, including both direct and indirect pathways identified in the analysis.

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 3, 413-437
http://dx.doi.org/10.66815/ejecs/2947
Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

Figure 2

Structural Model of Intercultural Communication, Social Adaptation, Social Cohesion, and Community-Based Engagement



Note. Standardised path coefficients are reported along the arrows. Significance levels are based on bootstrapping results (*p < .05, **p < .01, and ***p < .001).

Figure 2 highlights the coexistence of both direct and indirect pathways linking intercultural processes to community-based engagement. Intercultural communication primarily influences engagement through direct interactional pathways, whereas social adaptation contributes indirectly through the development of social cohesion. This visual representation reinforces the interpretation that participation in multicultural contexts emerges through multiple relational mechanisms, including both pragmatic coordination and cohesion-based relational processes.

Overview of the Analytical Model

The analytical model demonstrates strong explanatory power for both social cohesion and community-based engagement. Intercultural communication and social adaptation explain a substantial proportion of variance in social cohesion, while all three predictors jointly account for a large share of variance in engagement. These relatively high R^2 values should be interpreted cautiously, as they may reflect conceptual proximity among constructs and the use of self-reported data.

The results reveal differentiated patterns of influence across constructs. Intercultural communication is positively associated with social cohesion ($\beta = 0.284$, $p = .019$), indicating that communicative openness supports perceptions of belonging and connectedness. However, social adaptation has shown a substantially stronger effect ($\beta = 0.620$, $p < .001$), suggesting that longer-term adaptive processes play a more central role in consolidating cohesion. For community-based engagement, intercultural communication demonstrates a strong direct effect ($\beta = 0.364$, $p < .001$), indicating that participation may emerge through pragmatic coordination across ethnic boundaries.

In contrast, the direct effect of social adaptation is weaker and marginally significant ($\beta = 0.206$, $p = .049$). This suggests a more indirect and context-dependent influence, particularly in how it interacts with other factors such as community dynamics and individual motivations for engagement.

Social cohesion is strongly associated with engagement ($\beta = 0.414$, $p < .001$), confirming its role as a key relational foundation for collective participation. Mediation analysis further clarifies these relationships. The indirect effect of intercultural communication through social cohesion is not significant ($\beta = 0.117$, $p = .077$), indicating the absence of a cohesion-based mediation pathway. By contrast, social cohesion significantly mediates the relationship between social adaptation and engagement ($\beta = 0.256$, $p = .001$). Overall, the findings demonstrate that intercultural communication and social adaptation operate through distinct yet complementary mechanisms. Communication primarily supports immediate coordination and situational participation, whereas adaptation contributes to the development of social cohesion. This in turn enables more stable and relationally embedded forms of engagement, such as long-term relationships and collaborative efforts within diverse communities.

Discussion

Revisiting Social Cohesion as a Negotiated Outcome in Multicultural Cities

This study has reconceptualised social cohesion as a relational and dynamically negotiated outcome emerging from everyday interaction and longer-term adaptive processes in multicultural urban environments. The findings show that both intercultural communication and social adaptation contribute to social cohesion, but in analytically distinct ways. While communication supports cohesion through interactional coordination, adaptation demonstrates a substantially stronger effect. Cohesion is more deeply consolidated through cumulative processes over time.

From this viewpoint, social cohesion is not a fixed attribute but a continuous relational achievement. Intercultural communication enables pragmatic cooperation in everyday encounters, whereas social adaptation stabilizes these experiences into shared norms, expectations, and trust. This interpretation aligns with process-oriented approaches that conceptualize cohesion as an emergent outcome sustained through repeated interaction and adaptive practices (Dielini et al., 2022; Holliday, 2022; Nesterova & Kim, 2024; Neumann et al., 2023).

The empirical proximity between intercultural communication and social adaptation reflects their complementary roles, rather than conceptual redundancy. Communication encapsulates interactional competence in situ, whereas adaptation signifies the cumulative internalization of these experiences into more stable behavioural orientations. Together, they operate along a shared process continuum at different temporal levels.

Importantly, the findings challenge the assumption that effective communication alone is sufficient to produce cohesive social relations. Communication enables coordination but does not necessarily generate durable relational integration. Instead, adaptation plays a more central role in building trust, shared expectations, and a sense of belonging over time (Allen et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of temporal depth in the formation of cohesion. By situating the analysis in urban Indonesia, the study extends existing research to a Global South context where diversity is historically embedded and largely governed through informal social practices (Hoon, 2017; Ricks, 2022). In such settings, cohesion is not institutionally produced but continuously negotiated through everyday interaction, reinforcing its context-dependent and relational nature.

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 3, 413-437
http://dx.doi.org/10.66815/ejecs/2947
Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

Intercultural Communication: Enabling Interaction without Necessarily Producing Integration

The findings indicate that intercultural communication is positively associated with both social cohesion and community-based engagement. Communication contributes directly to engagement, while its indirect effect through social cohesion was not statistically significant. This pattern suggests that intercultural communication primarily operates through direct interactional pathways rather than through the development of cohesive relational structures. This finding highlights the role of communicative openness, accommodation, and cultural sensitivity in facilitating cooperation across ethnic boundaries (Harwood, 2020; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022).

The absence of a significant mediating effect further indicates that communication can enable participation independently of deeper relational consolidation. Individuals may therefore cooperate and engage in collective activities without necessarily developing strong interpersonal trust or a shared sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). In a multicultural urban context, interactional competence and situational coordination can support participation, even in the absence of strong communal attachment. This suggests that engagement may be driven by pragmatic coordination and task-oriented cooperation rather than by fully internalised social cohesion.

From an ethnic and cultural studies perspective, this distinction underscores the analytical differences between interactional effectiveness and relational integration. Communication may enable coexistence and collaboration in shared social spaces, even where historical tensions or structural inequalities persist (Holliday, 2022). In this sense, intercultural communication functions as a pragmatic mechanism for managing diversity rather than transforming underlying relational conditions. These findings therefore qualify assumptions that increased intercultural interaction necessarily leads to deeper social cohesion (Beugelsdijk & Klasing, 2016; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011). While communication remains a necessary condition for interaction across difference, it is not sufficient to produce sustained relational integration, as it often fails to address the deeper social and structural factors that influence long-term relationships among diverse groups. This reinforces the importance of distinguishing between short-term interactional processes and longer-term adaptive mechanisms in explaining how cohesion develops in multicultural urban environments (Cormoș, 2022).

Social Adaptation as a Relational Foundation of Cohesion

In contrast to intercultural communication, social adaptation demonstrates a stronger association with social cohesion and exerts a significant indirect effect on community-based engagement through it. This pattern suggests that adaptation serves as a foundational relational mechanism, both stabilizing and institutionalizing intercultural experiences over time. Through repeated intercultural encounters, individuals gradually incorporate new norms and expectations into everyday practices, thereby strengthening trust, predictability, and a sense of belonging (Berry, 2023; Döbler & Carbon, 2023).

The significant mediating role of social cohesion further suggests that adaptation contributes to engagement primarily by reinforcing the relational conditions that sustain cooperation. Cumulative learning and behavioural adjustments transform episodic interactions into

routinised and predictable social relationships, supporting more stable forms of collective participation. This finding aligns with process-oriented perspectives that conceptualize adaptation as a mechanism through which interactional experiences are consolidated into more durable social ties (Huff et al., 2021). Importantly, these results contrast with the direct and interactional pathway observed for intercultural communication. Adaptation operates through a more temporally extended and structurally embedded process. While communication facilitates immediate coordination, adaptation enables the internalization of shared expectations that underpin sustained cooperation and participation.

At the same time, adaptation should not be understood as a neutral or evenly distributed process. Adaptive expectations may exhibit asymmetrical structures among ethnic groups, mirroring overarching power dynamics and historically entrenched disparities. Some groups may be required to adjust more extensively, while others retain greater influence in shaping the norms governing interaction. This study has not directly measured power asymmetries, but their potential influence is critical for interpreting how adaptation operates within unequal social contexts. By acknowledging these asymmetries, the analysis extends beyond purely interactional explanations and situates adaptation within broader social hierarchies, strengthening the study's theoretical contribution.

Differentiated Pathways to Community-Based Engagement

A key contribution of this study lies in identifying differentiated relational pathways linking intercultural processes to community-based engagement. The findings reveal two distinct mechanisms through which engagement emerges in multicultural urban contexts: intercultural communication facilitates participation directly through interactional coordination, whereas social adaptation contributes indirectly through the development of social cohesion.

This distinction challenges the linear assumptions in existing literature that position social cohesion as a necessary precondition for collective participation. In multicultural cities characterised by negotiated coexistence, individuals may engage in collective activities for pragmatic reasons. This indicates a reliance on communicative competence, rather than strong emotional attachment or deeply internalised social bonds (Allen et al., 2021). Participation may thus arise from interactional effectiveness even in the absence of consolidated relational cohesion. At the same time, sustained and more stable forms of engagement appear to be more likely when adaptive processes reinforce trust and shared norms underpinning social cohesion (Moustakas, 2023; Neumann et al., 2023; Beugelsdijk & Klasing, 2016). Different forms of engagement should be analytically distinguished, as some are situational and coordination-based, while others are cohesion-driven and relationally embedded.

By demonstrating these differentiated pathways, the study extends existing research by showing that community-based engagement in multicultural contexts does not follow a single developmental trajectory but emerges through multiple relational mechanisms operating across different temporal scales. While interactional processes enable immediate participation, cohesion-based engagement reflects more enduring relational structures grounded in reciprocal trust, which are more likely to sustain long-term collaboration and collective action (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021).

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 3, 413-437
http://dx.doi.org/10.66815/ejecs/2947
Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

Implications for Ethnic and Cultural Studies

The findings offer several important theoretical and analytical contributions to ethnic and cultural studies. First, the study demonstrates the analytical value of distinguishing between intercultural communication and social adaptation as conceptually and empirically distinct yet interconnected processes shaping ethnic relations. Intercultural communication primarily facilitates interactional coordination in immediate encounters, whereas social adaptation reinforces longer-term relational cohesion through cumulative learning and behavioural adjustments. By explicitly differentiating these processes along temporal and functional dimensions, the study advances a more precise analytical framework which extends beyond approaches conflating interactional competence with deeper relational integration (Cormoș, 2022; Kaya, 2014).

Second, the study challenges linear and universalistic models that assume a single pathway from communication to cohesion and participation, by showing that social cohesion does not uniformly mediate intercultural processes. Instead, cohesion emerges as a contingent relational mechanism, whose mediating role varies depending on whether intercultural processes operate at the level of immediate interaction or longer-term adaptation (Nesterova & Kim, 2024; Dielini et al., 2022). This insight promotes a more differentiated understanding of cohesion as a conditional and context-sensitive mechanism, rather than a universal intermediary outcome.

Third, the study provides further analysis to the ongoing debates by providing empirical evidence from a Global South urban context, thereby extending scholarship that has been predominantly grounded in Western experiences of migration and integration. The findings indicate that ethnic relations and social cohesion may be sustained through everyday negotiation, pragmatic interaction, and adaptive practices in contexts where diversity is historically embedded rather than institutionally managed (Hoon, 2017; Ricks, 2022). This shifts the analytical focus from formal, policy-driven models of integration toward informal, relational, and practice-based mechanisms of coexistence which have been underrepresented in existing literature. These contributions advance ethnic and cultural studies by proposing a relational and processual framework in which social cohesion is conceptualised not as a fixed or end-state outcome, but as a dynamic and continuously negotiated achievement emerging from differentiated intercultural processes operating across temporal and contextual dimensions. This framework provides a more nuanced basis for understanding how multicultural coexistence is sustained in complex and historically embedded contexts of diversity.

Toward a Process-Oriented Understanding of Social Cohesion

The findings support a process-oriented reconceptualization of social cohesion in multicultural cities. Cohesion is best understood as a dynamic and continuously negotiated relational accomplishment shaped by interactional and adaptive processes unfolding over time, rather than as a stable or idealised condition. Building on the empirical results, the study advances a clearer analytical distinction between interactional effectiveness and relational integration. Intercultural communication facilitates pragmatic coordination in everyday encounters, enabling cooperation across ethnic boundaries. In contrast, deeper relational integration appears more closely associated with cumulative adaptive processes that gradually reinforce trust, shared norms, and a sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). This distinction elucidates why effective interaction is a necessary but insufficient factor in fostering enduring cohesion.

By foregrounding these differentiated processes, the study encourages scholars to move beyond static and outcome-oriented conceptions of cohesion and instead examine the relational mechanisms through which cohesion is actively produced and sustained in everyday life. This perspective highlights that multicultural coexistence depends not only on the ability to communicate across difference but also on the capacity to internalize and stabilize intercultural experiences over time. Accordingly, the study proposes a process-oriented framework in which social cohesion emerges from the interplay between short-term interactional practices and longer-term adaptive dynamics, operating across multiple temporal layers of social life.

This framework contributes to a more nuanced understanding of multicultural coexistence by demonstrating that cohesion is not a singular outcome. Rather, cohesion is a layered and evolving process shaped by the interaction between immediate coordination and cumulative adaptation. In doing so, it provides a more robust conceptual basis for analysing how diverse urban communities are able to sustain cooperation under conditions of enduring cultural differences (Dielini et al., 2022; Nesterova & Kim, 2024).

Conclusion

This study examined how intercultural communication and social adaptation contribute to the negotiation of social cohesion and ethnic relations in multicultural urban contexts, drawing on empirical evidence from urban Indonesia. By adopting a process-oriented perspective, the findings demonstrate that social cohesion is not an automatic or uniform outcome but rather emerges through differentiated relational pathways shaped by everyday interaction and longer-term adaptive processes (Dielini et al., 2022). The results highlight the distinct and complementary roles of intercultural communication and social adaptation. Intercultural communication promotes both collaboration and engagement across ethnic divides through interactional processes that enable pragmatic coordination in everyday encounters. However, while communication supports functional coexistence, it does not necessarily produce durable relational integration. In contrast, social adaptation plays a more foundational role by embedding intercultural experiences into shared norms, trust, and a sense of belonging over time (Allen et al., 2021). Empirically, social adaptation demonstrates a substantially stronger association with social cohesion, underscoring the importance of longer-term adaptive processes in sustaining cohesion.

A key contribution of this study is the demonstration that social cohesion does not function as a universal mediating mechanism linking intercultural processes to collective outcomes. While cohesion mediates the relationship between social adaptation and community-based engagement, it does not mediate the relationship between intercultural communication and engagement. This finding highlights the multiple relational pathways through which participation emerges, ranging from pragmatic interactional coordination, to cohesion-based engagement grounded in trust and shared expectations (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021).

By situating the analysis in a Global South urban context, the study extends ethnic and cultural studies beyond Western-centric models of multiculturalism. The case of urban Indonesia illustrates how social cohesion and ethnic relations can be sustained through everyday negotiation, informal practices, and adaptive social processes in contexts where diversity is historically embedded rather than institutionally managed (Hoon, 2017; Ricks, 2022). Overall, this study advances a process-oriented and relational framework of social cohesion. Cohesion is understood here as a dynamic outcome emerging from the interplay between interactional and adaptive processes. By distinguishing between interactional effectiveness and relational integration, the

Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

study provides a more nuanced analytical lens for understanding how multicultural urban communities sustain coexistence under conditions of enduring diversity and inequality.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limited the ability to capture the temporal dynamics of intercultural communication, social adaptation, and social cohesion. The findings should therefore be interpreted as associational rather than causal. Future research using longitudinal or panel designs would provide a more robust understanding of how these processes evolve. Second, the study has relied on self-reported, single-source data which may be subject to common method bias. Although diagnostic tests suggest this issue is not a dominant concern, inflated relationships remain a possibility. Future studies should adopt multi-method approaches, combining survey data with behavioural, observational, or qualitative evidence (Hair et al., 2021). Third, the use of non-probabilistic purposive sampling within a single urban context and a relatively young and student-dominated sample has limited generalizability. Future research could enhance external validity by employing probability-based sampling and including more diverse demographic and socioeconomic groups. Fourth, the study has not explicitly measured power asymmetries and structurally embedded inequalities that may shape intercultural relations. Future research should incorporate measures of power, inequality, and group positioning to better capture adaptation in asymmetrical contexts. Finally, while the focus on urban Indonesia provides valuable insights into the Global South, the findings may not generalize to other settings, particularly in rural areas or different cultural contexts, such as those found in Southeast Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa. Comparative studies across multicultural cities would develop the broader applicability of the relational pathways identified here.

Authors' Contributions

Syamsidar Syamsidar conceptualised the study, led the theoretical development, and supervised the research process. Rusdiah Rusdiah contributed to data interpretation and manuscript development. Awaluddin Syamsu conducted data analysis and contributed to methodology design. Wahyuni Wahyuni supported literature review and manuscript editing. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to the Dean of the Faculty of Letters, Communication, and Education at Universitas Muslim Indonesia for institutional support

and encouragement throughout the research process and to all participants for their valuable contributions to this study. The authors are also grateful to the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and insightful suggestions, which have significantly improved the quality and clarity of this manuscript. This manuscript has been professionally proofread for English language quality.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors, and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

AI Declaration Statement

The authors declare that AI-assisted tools were used in a limited capacity during manuscript preparation, solely for language editing and translation into English. These tools were employed to improve clarity, grammar, and overall readability. AI tools were not used for the development of research ideas, theoretical framing, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, or the formulation of conclusions. All conceptualizations, research designs, analyses, and academic interpretations presented in this study are the authors' original works, for which they take full intellectual responsibility. The authors confirm that the use of AI-assisted language tools complies with established academic ethical standards and does not compromise the originality, integrity, or authorship of the research.

References

Alesina, A., & La Ferrara, E. (2005). Ethnic diversity and economic performance. *Journal of Economic Literature, 43*(3), 762–800. https://doi.org/10.1257/002205105774431243

Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Rozek, C. S., McInerney, D. M., & Slavich, G. M. (2021). Belonging: Conceptual issues and integrative framework. *Australian Journal of Psychology, 73*(1), 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409

Allwood, J. (2023). A model of intercultural communication revisited. In J. Allwood (Ed.), *Intercultural communication*. IntechOpen. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.110074

Berry, J. W. (2023). Acculturation and adaptation revisited. *Applied Psychology, 72*(2), 387–412. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12389

Beugelsdijk, S., & Klasing, M. J. (2016). Diversity and trust: The role of shared values. *Journal of Comparative Economics, 44*(3), 522–540. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2015.10.014

Bibi, F., & Hamida, L. (2024). Communication accommodation among international students in Indonesia. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 11*(1), Article 2397188. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2397188

Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

Bilven, B., Nyúl, B., & Kende, A. (2022). Exclusive victimhood and reconciliation among native and Chinese Indonesians. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 91*, 262–273. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.10.011

Bolaji, S., & Imonitie, O. (2025). The Lived-Experiences of African Migrant Professionals in Diverse Workplaces in Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 12*(3), 53–70. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/236

Brubaker, R. (2006). *Ethnicity without groups*. Harvard University Press.

Cormoș, V. C. (2022). Adaptation, assimilation, and integration in migration contexts. *Sustainability, 14*(16), 10296. https://doi.org/10.3390/su141610296

David, R., Nigoti, U., & Singh, S. (2024). Intercultural communication competence and employee engagement. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 105*, 102098. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.102098

Dervin, F., & Gross, Z. (2023). Interculturality, reflexivity, and social relations. *Multicultural Education Review, 15*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2023.2171234

Dielini, M., Portera, A., Nesterova, M., & Milani, M. (2022). Social cohesion in intercultural educational communities. *Skhid, 3*(2), 40–48. https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2022.3(2).263601

Döbler, T., & Carbon, C. C. (2023). Cultural flexibility and social adaptation. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1189457. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1189457

Foo, C. (2023). 'If Our Love Existed in Chinese Tense': Temporal Tensions in Xiaolu Guo's A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers. *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics, 7*(2), Article 30. https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/13558

Guo, W. (2025). Conflict resolution in intercultural communication. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 12*(1), Article 4391. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-04391-0

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2021). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Harwood, J. (2020). Social identity theory. In J. Van den Bulck (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of media psychology*. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119011071.iemp0153

Holliday, A. (2022). Cultural complexity and intercultural communication. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 22*(4), 389–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2022.2109561

Hoon, C. (2017). Putting religion into multiculturalism: Conceptualizing religious multiculturalism in Indonesia. *Asian Studies Review, 41*(3), 476–493. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2017.1334761

Huff, S. T., Hanek, K. J., Lee, F., & Brannen, M. Y. (2021). Cultural adaptation and historical heterogeneity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 85*, 141–155. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.09.008

Kaya, Y. (2014). Determining the pre-service teachers' awareness, knowledge and competency about multicultural education. *Asian Journal of Instruction, 2*(1(ÖZEL)), 102–115. https://doi.org/10.20897/apjes/16946

Kecskes, I. (2023). Intercultural communication and language. In *Perspectives in pragmatics, philosophy & psychology*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30160-5_3

Luo, J., Jian, I. Y., Yung, E. H. K., Chan, E. H. W., & Chen, W. (2023). Social cohesion in cultural contexts. *Current Issues in Tourism, 27*(15), 2499–2515. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2023.2235878

Mansouri, F., & Elias, A. (2021). The intercultural dialogue index. *Social Indicators Research, 155*(2), 411–453. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02616-8

Moustakas, L. (2023). Social cohesion: Definitions and consequences. *Encyclopedia, 3*(3), 1028–1037. https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia3030075

Nesterova, Y., & Kim, E. A. (2024). Peace as social cohesion. *Peace Review, 36*(3), 531–544. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2024.2377773

Neumann, R., Pfetsch, B., Hutter, S., Koschut, S., Schieferdecker, D., & Specht, J. (2023). Rhetoric of solidarity and social cohesion. *Social Indicators Research, 169*(3), 863–882. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03163-0

Oviedo-Berrocal, L., Ortiz-Padilla, M., Zwierewicz, M., Vargas-Arteaga, J., & Gómez-García, M. (2026). STEM+intercultural: Integrating STEM education with indigenous ancestral knowledge, traditional knowledge, and intercultural contexts. A systematic literature review. *European Journal of STEM Education, 11*(1), Article 25. https://doi.org/10.20897/ejsteme/18476

Pattipeilhy, S. C. H., & Paramasatya, S. (2022). Ethnic scapegoating and Indonesian-Chinese relations. In *Proceedings of the ICISPE Conference*. https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.14-9-2021.2321412

Piller, I. (2021). *Intercultural communication: A critical introduction* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.

Portes, A., & Vickstrom, E. (2011). Diversity, social capital, and cohesion. *Annual Review of Sociology, 37*(1), 461–479. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150022

Putnam, R. D. (2007). E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century. *Scandinavian Political Studies, 30*(2), 137–174. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2007.00176.x

Ricks, J. I. (2022). Ethnic language and audience opinion in Southeast Asia. *Journal of East Asian Studies, 22*(3), 457–479. https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2022.20

Schiefer, D., & van der Noll, J. (2017). The essentials of social cohesion: A literature review. *Social Indicators Research, 132*(2), 579–603. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1314-5

Schefers, S. E. (2026). Exploring intersectionality in identity research in multicultural education: Reflecting on the past to forge a more equitable future. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education and Society, 14*(1), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.20897/apjes/17906

Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. (2022). What is intercultural communication? *Language and Intercultural Communication, 22*(3), 267–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2022.2038432

Stahl, G. K., & Maznevski, M. L. (2021). Cultural diversity in teams. *Journal of International Business Studies, 52*(1), 4–22. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00389-9

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (2004). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In J. T. Jost & J. Sidanius (Eds.), *Political psychology: Key readings* (pp. 276–293). Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203505984-16

Uslaner, E. M. (2002). *The moral foundations of trust*. Cambridge University Press.

Verkuyten, M. (2018). *The social psychology of ethnic identity*. Routledge.

Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

Ward, C., Szabó, Á., & Stuart, J. (2021). Cultural adaptation and social cohesion. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 84*, 60–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.07.002

Watters, S. M., Ward, C., & Stuart, J. (2020). Multiculturalism and social cohesion. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 75*, 82–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.02.001

Wimmer, A. (2013). *Ethnic boundary making*. Oxford University Press.

Wise, A., & Velayutham, S. (2009). *Everyday multiculturalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Yang, C., Biemans, H., & Liu, J. (2025). Intercultural communication challenges of Chinese students. *Journal of Intercultural Communication, 25*(1). https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v25i1.993

Yoon, E., Langrehr, K., & Ong, L. Z. (2023). Intercultural competence and social connectedness. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 52*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2022.2144507

Yuval-Davis, N. (2011). *The politics of belonging: Intersectional contestations*. Sage.

Notes on Contributors

Syamsidar is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Literature at Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Indonesia. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, gender and ethnic studies, applied linguistics, and sociology. She is actively involved in scholarly activities and is a member of several professional associations in applied linguistics. Email: syamsidar.syamsidar@umi.ac.id

Rusdiah is an Associate Professor and currently serves as the Dean of the Faculty of Literature at Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Indonesia. Her research focuses on linguistics, English education, and applied linguistics. She is actively engaged in academic leadership and contributes to national and professional associations in applied linguistics. Email: rusdiah.rusdiah@umi.ac.id

Awaluddin Syamsu is a lecturer and Deputy Dean at the Faculty of English Literature, Universitas Muslim Indonesia. He is also a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction at the School of Education, Southern Illinois University, USA. His research interests include English language education, curriculum development, and AI-supported learning in EFL contexts. Email: awaluddin.syamsu@siu.edu

Wahyuni is a lecturer at the Faculty of English Literature, Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Makassar, Indonesia. Her research interests focus on English language education, EFL pedagogy, and applied linguistics. She has published in the field of English education and is actively involved in academic journal management. Email: wahyuni.wahyuni@umi.ac.id

ORCID

Syamsidar, https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8431-8364
Rusdiah, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3492-4765
Awaluddin Syamsu, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6618-9924
Wahyuni, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6561-2495