

Intercultural Communication Competence among Indonesian Pre-Service Teachers: a Quantitative Study

Mas Muhammad Idris

Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia, DKI Jakarta, Indonesia

e-mail: masmuhammadidris@unusia.ac.id

Masnia Ningsih

Universitas Islam Majapahit, Mojokerto, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

e-mail: masnia_ningsih@unim.ac.id

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Abstract

The concept of intercultural communication competence (ICC) has become increasingly important in both formal and informal language learning contexts. ICC refers to the ability to communicate effectively with individuals from diverse cultural, linguistic, and normative backgrounds. Despite its significance, there is a gap in the literature regarding the assessment of ICC, particularly in the context of Indonesian teachers. The aim of this study is to assess the level of ICC among pre-service teachers in Indonesia. The study involved 66 randomly selected participants from three Indonesian private universities. Data were collected using a valid and reliable questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA test, with normality as a prerequisite. The results revealed that pre-service teachers exhibited a high level of ICC, with strong intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Furthermore, no significant differences were found based on the universities attended, indicating that the institution did not influence ICC levels. These findings underscore the importance of assessing ICC in pre-service teachers and suggest that they are well-equipped to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds in language learning contexts. The study highlights the need for further exploration of ICC in educational settings.

Keywords: assessment; Indonesia; intercultural communication competence; language learning; pre-service teachers

Introduction

As the world becomes more interconnected and culturally diverse, intercultural communication competence (ICC) skills are increasingly vital. The increasing pace of globalization, technological advancements, and cultural interdependence necessitate the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with people from diverse cultural

backgrounds (Tikhonova & Raitskaya, 2024; Delor, 1996; Idris, 2019). ICC has garnered significant scholarly attention and is often defined as a multidimensional construct involving attitudes, skills, knowledge, and awareness that enable individuals to engage successfully in cross-cultural interactions (Guncavdi & Polat, 2016; Idris, 2020; Zheng, 2014). According to Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002), it involves using a second language effectively while maintaining respect for cultural diversity.

In Indonesia, where cultural plurality characterizes both society and classrooms, evaluating the ICC of pre-service teachers is of particular importance. These future educators must not only master pedagogical content, but also foster inclusive learning environments that respect and celebrate cultural diversity.

While various models of ICC have been developed—such as Byram's (1997) "Savoir" model and Deardorff's (2006) process-oriented framework—this study adopts the Pestalozzi/Lazar model. This choice is grounded in its pragmatic, behaviourally anchored indicators and compatibility with educational assessment practices. However, the article acknowledges that the Pestalozzi/Lazar model offers a more descriptive rather than developmental or process-based view, which may limit its depth compared to the layered progression of Byram's or Deardorff's models.

Despite the model's limitations, its structured, observable indicators offer a valuable tool for measuring ICC in contexts where large-scale or standardized assessment is required. The intercultural communication competence is built upon three core elements: attitude, skill, and knowledge in intercultural contexts. These were operationalized through a localized, self-report questionnaire. Prior to full deployment, the instrument underwent a rigorous adaptation process including expert validation, pilot testing, and reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha to ensure its cultural appropriateness for Indonesian pre-service teachers. The localized version maintained the integrity of the original constructs while refining terminology and context to ensure conceptual alignment.

According to Huber and Reynolds (2014) and Ahmadi (2022), the ICC encompasses the integration of respectful attitudes, critical skills, and deep knowledge that enable positive intercultural interactions. Similarly, Byram (1997) highlights ICC as the ability to communicate and interpret meaning across cultural boundaries with curiosity and openness. Fantini (2006, 2009) and Bennett (1993) provide further theoretical elaboration, stressing that ICC develops through stages and includes a blend of ethnocentric and

ethnorelative perspectives. However, translating these theoretical constructs into survey items presents challenges.

In this study, the operational definitions for the dimensions are as follows: "intercultural attitude" reflects behaviours such as openness, respect, and curiosity toward other cultures; "intercultural skill" includes perspective-taking, empathy, and critical reflection; and "intercultural knowledge" involves awareness of cultural practices, societal structures, and belief systems. While these dimensions map onto the broader literature, the reliance on self-report data inherently limits the ability to capture the full complexity of ICC. For instance, affective and behavioural dimensions may be underreported or misrepresented due to social desirability bias. Furthermore, the model's descriptive structure does not fully align with the developmental insights of other ICC frameworks, limiting deeper longitudinal analysis.

Language teachers, including pre-service educators, must possess both linguistic and intercultural competence. Mere grammatical proficiency is insufficient without an understanding of cultural nuances. For example, Indonesian students may misinterpret phrases such as "goodnight" due to differing cultural conventions. Teachers must help students navigate such subtleties through intercultural knowledge and sensitivity (Madya, 2013).

The Indonesian context, characterized by ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, provides fertile ground for the development of ICC. Yet, as Madya (2013) notes, miscommunication persists due to limited intercultural awareness. Implementing an intercultural language curriculum that integrates both linguistic and cultural dimensions is essential. Pre-service teachers must therefore be equipped with robust ICC to lead these educational efforts.

Borghetti (2017) and Scarino (2009) advocate for the assessment of ICC as an educational priority. Assessment not only guides instruction but also enhances student motivation and identity development. Moreover, well-constructed assessments can provide formative insights and improve

educational practices. However, ICC assessment is inherently complex. The chosen self-report survey method, while practical, may not fully capture the nuances of intercultural behaviour. Mixed-method approaches—including interviews, observations, and portfolios—could enrich the validity of future assessments (Shuguang & Qiufang, 2018).

While numerous studies have explored various dimensions of ICC (e.g., Guncavdi & Polat, 2016; Xiaole, Meng, & Manli, 2012; Deardorff, 2006), limited attention has been given to systematically assessing ICC among Indonesian pre-service teachers. Most research remains descriptive and does not deeply engage with the theoretical frameworks or methodological limitations involved in measuring ICC.

To address this gap, the current study aims to assess the ICC levels—encompassing attitude, skill, and knowledge—of pre-service teachers from three universities in Indonesia using a localized version of the Pestalozzi/Lazar framework. Then, this study is designed to explore these research questions: (1) what is the level of intercultural communication competence (ICC), including intercultural attitude, skill, and knowledge, among pre-service teachers in Indonesia? And (2) are there significant differences in ICC levels among pre-service teachers based on their university affiliation?

This research contributes to the discourse on intercultural competence by providing empirical insights into the preparedness of future Indonesian educators to navigate and promote intercultural understanding in the classroom. It also critically reflects on the strengths and limitations of using structured self-report measures in culturally diverse educational contexts.

Research Method

This research utilized a descriptive quantitative design to assess the level of intercultural communication competence (ICC) among pre-service teachers in Indonesia. A descriptive quantitative approach

was deemed appropriate for this study as it allows the researchers to quantify participants' self-perceived intercultural competencies using structured instruments, thereby providing a comprehensive statistical overview of the variables in question. This design also enables comparative analysis among groups, in this case, students from three different universities.

The collected data was employed over a two-month period, from April to May 2024. Data were collected from three universities: University of Cordova, University of Islam Majapahit, and University of Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia. Each university granted permission to distribute the questionnaire to its pre-service teachers. Data analysis was carried out in June 2024 using SPSS software.

Data were gathered by using a reliable questionnaire administered in person and online. The researchers coordinated with faculty members from each university to facilitate distribution and collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to their involvement.

The participants in this study were 66 pre-service teachers selected randomly from a total population of 80 students enrolled in teacher education programs at three universities in Indonesia: University of Cordova, University of Islam Majapahit, and University of Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia. These universities were chosen due to their active teacher training programs and accessibility for data collection. A simple random sampling technique was used to ensure that each student in the population had an equal chance of being selected. Of the 66 participants, 21 were male (31.8%) and 45 were female (68.2%), as illustrated in chart 1.

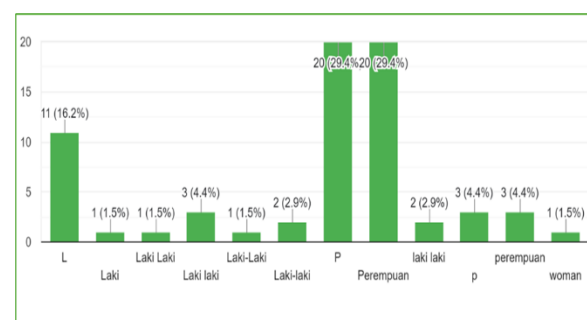


Chart 1 Characteristic of participants

The instrument used in this study is adapted from Pestalozzi Programme and the Intercultural Cities project by the Council of European/Europe Commission and the European Wergeland Center (Iazar, 2018). The instrument, titled *Recognizing Intercultural Competence: Indicators of Intercultural Proficiency*, originally consisted of 56 items designed to assess the fundamental components of intercultural competence (IC).

These components are delineated into three primary areas: intercultural attitude (20 items), which includes several aspects namely respect, tolerance for ambiguity, open-mindedness, curiosity, empathy, self-awareness, and the confidence to engage in and confront challenges; intercultural skill (22 items), covering interaction, multiperspectivity, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and personal development; and intercultural knowledge (15 items), encompassing understanding of interaction dynamics, social practices, roles of social and political actors, and diverse worldviews and belief systems. The original items were formatted using a 5-point Likert scale, where respondents indicated their frequency of behavior from 1 (never) to 5 (always). To ensure accuracy in responses and avoid misinterpretation, the instrument was translated into Indonesian. The choice of this self-assessment tool was based on the selection criteria outlined by Almeida et al. (2012) as cited by Idris (2020).

The validity of the adapted instrument was ensured through expert judgment involving three university lecturers specializing in language education and intercultural communication. They evaluated the instrument's content relevance, clarity, and appropriateness. A pilot study involving 20 pre-service teachers (not part of the main sample) was conducted to test the reliability. The instrument showed strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.87 for intercultural attitude, 0.89 for intercultural skill, and 0.85 for intercultural knowledge—indicating high reliability.

The descriptive, and one-way anova tests were utilized to do an analysis related to

the data with different methods. Initially, descriptive statistics were applied to obtain information on the level of intercultural communication competence (ICC) and its key components: intercultural attitude, intercultural skill, and intercultural knowledge. The researchers categorized the levels of ICC using interval conversion, which is detailed in appendix 1.

The second analytical method employed was the one-way anova test, which consisted of two stages: an initial prerequisite test of normality test followed by the one-way anova test itself. Prerequisite test was conducted to assess the normality of the data distribution. The findings revealed that data were normally distributed in most locations, as evidenced by the sig. value 0.977 of homogeneity test of variances. The detailed result is presented in appendix 2.

The one-way anova test was employed to determine whether there is statistical evidence that existed in the levels of intercultural communication competence (ICC) among the pre-service teachers based on their studying locations. A significance, value greater than 0.05, would indicate the absence of statistically significant differences amongst them.

In relation to the research hypothesis, the researcher seeks to investigate the levels of intercultural communication competence (ICC) – encompassing intercultural attitudes, intercultural skill, and intercultural knowledge – among the pre-service teachers in Indonesia and also to determine whether significant disparities exist in these levels depending on the teacher's locations within the aforementioned three universities. Furthermore, the study formulates hypotheses to ascertain whether there are significant variations in intercultural communication competence, in terms of its constituent elements, those are attitude, skill, and knowledge, based on where they study.

Result and Discussion

The intercultural communication competence (ICC) level

This initial section delineates key findings derived from the statistical data analyses, which address the level of intercultural communication competence (ICC) among pre-teachers in Indonesia. Specifically, the research outcomes encompass a range of statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics of overall intercultural communication competence (IC) that integrates its constituent elements—attitude, skill, and knowledge—as well as detailed analyses of intercultural attitude (IA), intercultural skill (IS), and intercultural knowledge (IK).

Table 1 Mean score of ICC category

Mean Score	Category
$x > 168$	Very High
$136 < x \leq 168$	High
$104 < x \leq 136$	Medium
$72 < x \leq 104$	Low
$x \leq 40$	Very Low

The descriptive statistics revealed that the mean score for intercultural communication competence (ICC) among the pre-service teachers was 144.35 (SD=20.11). Then, the mean score was cross-referenced with Table 1, revealing that the pre-service teachers from three different universities exhibited a high degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC), encompassing the three dimensions of ICC: attitude, skill, and knowledge. For detail of this descriptive statistics result of ICC level. For a comprehensive review of these descriptive statistics, please consult appendix 3.

This descriptive statistic reveals that pre-service teachers demonstrate a high level of ICC, as illustrated in Table 1. These findings suggest that these pre-service teachers exhibit significant respect for cultural diversity (Altan, 2018) and feel confident in their ability to adhere to the essential indicators of ICC—attitude, skill, and knowledge (Rajic & Rajic, 2015). Furthermore, it appears that they effectively

integrate their understanding of cultural differences, languages, and norms into their teaching practices (Byram et al., 2002; Hong, 2008; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Kramsch, 2013). This high level of ICC also reflects a readiness to tolerate ambiguity, indicating that these teachers are willing to temporarily set aside their own cultural values and norms. This aligns with Huber & Reynolds' (2014) perspective on intercultural communication competence, which emphasizes the importance of respecting individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. They define "respect" as acknowledging and valuing all people, regardless of their differing cultural practices and beliefs.

Table 2 Mean score of IA category

Mean Score	Category
$x > 33.6$	Very High
$27.2 < x \leq 33.6$	High
$20.8 < x \leq 27.2$	Medium
$14.4 < x \leq 20.8$	Low
$x \leq 8$	Very Low

The descriptive statistics indicated that the mean score for intercultural communication competence (ICC) among the pre-service teachers was 27.56 (SD = 3.406). This mean score was then compared with Table 2, which demonstrated that pre-service teachers from three distinct universities displayed a high level of ICC, covering the three key dimensions: attitude, skill, and knowledge. For a comprehensive review of these descriptive statistics, please consult appendix 3.

The second set of descriptive statistics indicates that pre-service teachers possess a high level of intercultural attitude (IA), as detailed in Table 2. According to Byram (1997), this suggests that these pre-service teachers are well-equipped for successful intercultural interactions due to their openness to diverse cultures, beliefs, and behaviors. Furthermore, these pre-service teachers exhibit curiosity, openness, and a willingness to withhold judgment based on initial impressions during intercultural encounters. Additionally, their ability to engage positively with others, regardless of uncertainty about others' thoughts and feelings, reflects their

practical application of intercultural attitude in their interactions (Huber & Reynolds, 2014).

Furthermore, the high level of intercultural attitude among pre-service teachers indicates their awareness that their thinking and behavior are shaped by their own values and norms. This also demonstrates their openness to being challenged and their willingness to seek opportunities for collaboration and interaction with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, orientations, and perspectives (Laguttseva-Nogina et.al, 2024). According to Deardorff (2006), essential attitudes for intercultural communication competence include respect (valuing other cultures and cultural diversity), openness (to intercultural learning and withholding judgment), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty). Thus, it can be concluded that these pre-service teachers, through their demonstrated high intercultural attitudes, embody the requisite attitudes outlined by Deardorff.

Table 3 Mean score of IS category

Mean Score	Category
$x > 92.4$	Very High
$74.8 > x \leq 92.4$	High
$57.2 < x \leq 74.8$	Medium
$39.6 < x \leq 57.2$	Low
$x \leq 22$	Very Low

The descriptive statistics revealed a mean score of 81.67 (SD = 12.595) for intercultural communication competence (ICC) among pre-service teachers. Upon comparison with Table 3, it was evident that pre-service teachers from three separate universities exhibited a high level of ICC, spanning the three fundamental dimensions: attitude, skill, and knowledge. For a comprehensive review of these descriptive statistics, please consult appendix 3.

Another finding from this research is that pre-service teachers exhibit a high level of intercultural skill (IS), as presented in Table 6. This result suggests that these pre-service teachers are adept at interacting with individuals who have varying levels of problem-solving knowledge and skills and are capable of collaborating effectively with

others. Furthermore, it highlights their proficiency in critical thinking; for instance, they utilize some things like available information, and analytical skills to validate their interpretations. These insights are derived from the descriptive statistics reflecting the teachers' responses to the questionnaire concerning this particular element of intercultural communication competence (ICC).

Table 4 Mean score of IK category

Mean Score	Category
$x > 42$	Very High
$34 > x \leq 42$	High
$26 < x \leq 34$	Medium
$18 < x \leq 26$	Low
$x \leq 18$	Very Low

The descriptive statistics revealed a mean score of 50 (SD = 6.336) for intercultural communication competence (ICC) among pre-service teachers. Comparison with Table 4 demonstrated that pre-service teachers from three distinct universities displayed a superior level of ICC, encompassing the core dimensions of attitude, skill, and knowledge. For a comprehensive review of these descriptive statistics, please consult appendix 3.

Additionally, the third set of descriptive statistics reveals that pre-service teachers possess a high level of intercultural knowledge (IK), as detailed in Table 4. According to Huber and Reynolds (2014), this elevated intercultural knowledge indicates that these pre-service teachers understand the diverse objectives and norms associated with different types of interactions. They recognize that effective communication with individuals who have different goals and rules requires a deep understanding of social practices to minimize misunderstandings. Furthermore, these pre-service teachers actively seek to explore the underlying reasons for varying practices and reactions during conversations with individuals exhibiting different behaviors or attitudes. Most notably, their high level of intercultural knowledge suggests that they are likely aware that others may have distinct thoughts, behaviors, and feelings.

The key point of all from the results is that pre-service teachers from three different

universities in Indonesia exhibit a high degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC). They are adept at effectively communicating in the target language with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, values, and norms during intercultural interactions. Moreover, they demonstrate readiness to engage with people who have different orientations, goals, and rules. The descriptive statistics align with Altan's (2018) findings, which suggest that high intercultural communication competence fosters respect for cultural differences. This indicates that the pre-service teachers possess the ability to respect and engage with cultural diversity effectively.

The description of hypothesis result

Prior to conducting the one-way ANOVA test, prerequisite assumptions were tested to ensure the validity of the analysis. These included tests for normality and homogeneity of variances. The results indicated that the data met the necessary assumptions: the distribution of ICC scores across groups was approximately normal, and the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed a significance value above 0.05, confirming homogeneity.

The one-way anova test results showed a significance value of .349, which is greater than 0.05, as indicated in Table 8. This suggests that there are no significant differences in the level of intercultural communication competence (ICC) among pre-service teachers from three different universities in Indonesia, across its three elements: attitude, skill, and knowledge.

This outcome implies that the alternative hypothesis (H1), which posited significant differences in ICC levels among pre-service teachers based on their studying locations (three universities—University of Cordova, University of Islam Majapahit, and University of Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia), was not supported. Conversely, the result upheld the null hypothesis (H0), indicating no significant variation in IC levels among pre-service teachers according to their specific studying

locations in Indonesia. It can be seen in appendix 3.

Beyond the results of the descriptive statistics, the hypothesis testing reveals no significant differences in intercultural communication competence—encompassing attitude, skill, and knowledge—among pre-service teachers who are from three different universities. This suggests that all these pre-service teachers possess a similar level of proficiency in integrating cultural elements into their teaching practices.

Consequently, they are well-equipped to help their students develop intercultural competence and become effective intercultural communicators. As a result, students are likely to be adept at interacting with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, norms, and languages in intercultural settings.

Moreover, the uniformity in the level of intercultural communication competence (ICC) across the pre-service teachers confirms the null hypothesis, indicating that there are no significant differences in ICC based on the specific locations where these pre-service teachers are studying. This finding aligns with the studies by Rajic and Rajic (2015) and Guncavdi and Polat (2016), which demonstrate that geographical location does not impact the level of intercultural communication competence.

This research has several limitations. Firstly, it exclusively evaluates the intercultural communication competence (IC) of pre-service teachers from three different universities in Indonesia, without considering other pre-service teachers in the same area. Secondly, the study utilizes a self-assessment tool developed by the Pestalozzi Programme and the Intercultural Cities project of the Council of Europe and the European Wergeland Centre (2012), which focuses on only three dimensions of intercultural competence: attitude, skill, and knowledge. This choice was made despite the existence of various expert-developed tools with different dimensions of IC (e.g., Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2009; Deardorff, 2004, 2006; Bennett, 1993; Huber & Reynolds, 2014).

Thirdly, the research does not explore other independent variables, such as gender,

which could potentially influence the intercultural communication competence of pre-service teachers in Indonesia. The study only considers geographical locations—University of Cordova, University of Islam Majapahit, and University of Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia—as independent variables. Future studies could incorporate gender as a variable to provide additional insights.

Additionally, this research employs a descriptive quantitative approach using a questionnaire for data collection. Future research is recommended to include qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, or portfolios to gain a deeper understanding of intercultural competence levels. Finally, the findings cannot be generalized to all pre-service teachers across Indonesia, as the sample is limited to three universities mentioned. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that all pre-service teachers have comparable levels of intercultural competence.

Conclusion

This study aimed to evaluate the level of what is called “Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)” among pre-service teachers in Indonesia, specifically examining the dimensions of attitude, skill, and knowledge, and whether there were significant differences in ICC based on the pre-service teachers’ university affiliations. The results reveal that Indonesian pre-service teachers possess a high level of ICC across all three dimensions, reflecting their readiness to engage in intercultural teaching and learning environments. They demonstrate a strong ability to integrate cultural elements into their instructional practices, along with openness, empathy, and adaptability in cross-cultural contexts.

The findings also indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in ICC levels among pre-service teachers from the three selected universities: University of Cordova, University of Islam Majapahit, and University of Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia. This suggests a relatively uniform development of intercultural competence,

regardless of the geographical or institutional setting, thereby affirming the null hypothesis of the study.

In addition, pre-service teachers show particularly strong performance in the intercultural attitude dimension, marked by curiosity, tolerance, and a willingness to understand diverse perspectives. Their intercultural skills are evident in their ability to navigate complex social interactions and collaborate effectively with individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Similarly, their intercultural knowledge reflects a clear awareness of social norms, values, and interactional rules needed for meaningful intercultural communication.

Research limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 66 pre-service teachers from three universities only, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of Indonesian pre-service teachers. Second, the study used a self-assessment instrument developed by the Council of Europe’s Pestalozzi Programme, which focuses solely on three ICC dimensions. Other models, such as those by Byram (1997), Deardorff (2006), or Fantini (2009), offer broader or alternative conceptualizations of intercultural competence that were not explored. Third, only one independent variable—institutional affiliation—was considered, excluding other potentially relevant factors such as gender, teaching experience, or cultural background.

Recommendations for further research

Future studies should consider using larger and more diverse samples of pre-service teachers from various regions in Indonesia to enhance the representativeness of the findings. It is also recommended to do a relevance research with mixed-method approaches. Also using incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews, classroom observations, or teaching portfolios to gain a deeper understanding of how ICC is enacted in real teaching contexts. Moreover, future research

could explore additional variables (e.g., gender, intercultural training exposure, language proficiency) that may influence the development of intercultural competence among teacher candidates.

By expanding the scope and methodology, future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how pre-service teachers develop the intercultural competencies necessary to foster inclusive, globally aware classrooms.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interval Conversion of ICC

Score Interval	Categories
$x > \bar{x} + 1.85s$	Very high
$\bar{x} + 0.65s < x \leq \bar{x} + 1.85s$	High
$\bar{x} - 0.65s < x \leq \bar{x} + 0.65s$	Medium
$\bar{x} - 1.85s < x \leq \bar{x} - 0.65s$	Low
$x \leq \bar{x} - 1.85s$	Very low

Appendix 2. The Result of Normality Test

		Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Place of Studying	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Level of IC Understanding	Universitas Cordova	.170	22	.099	.972	22	.761
	Universitas Islam Majapahit	.121	22	.200 ^a	.979	22	.907
	Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia	.117	22	.200 ^a	.965	22	.603

^a. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Appendix 3. The Hypothesis Result

ANOVA					
Level of ICC Understanding	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	855.848	2	427.924	1.071	.349
Within Groups	25173.136	63	399.574		
Total	26028.985	65			