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Interpersonal Communication Strategy and Cultural Adaptation in Sriwijaya Dormitory

Ramadhan Berliano[1], Choirul Fajri[2]

[1,2]Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Literature, Culture and Communication, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Email: ramadhan2100030085@webmail.uad.ac.id[1], choirul.fajri@comm.uad.ac.id[2]

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the strategic role of interpersonal communication in mitigating culture shock experienced by students living in the Balai Sriwijaya male dormitory in Yogyakarta. It specifically addresses the following research questions: (1) How do students employ interpersonal communication strategies to cope with cultural dissonance? Moreover, (2) In what ways does such communication facilitate their psychological and cultural adjustment? Employing a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic interpretation. The study reveals that interpersonal communication is not merely supportive but also transformative in enabling students to navigate cultural dissonance and psychological adaptation. Findings highlight three core mechanisms: first, relational openness that fosters emotional safety and reduces uncertainty; second, peer-driven empathetic support that functions as a coping framework against disorientation and homesickness; and third, active cultural negotiation through daily dialogue, allowing students to reconstruct a hybrid identity without rejecting their cultural roots. The dormitory context serves as a living laboratory for intranational intercultural exchange, where communication becomes the primary tool for fostering inclusion, emotional resilience, and cognitive adaptation. Rather than passive assimilation, students engage in reciprocal meaning-making processes that reshape their worldview and strengthen their cultural competence. This study contributes to the scholarship of interpersonal and intercultural communication by contextualizing cultural adaptation within a domestic, student-based microenvironment. The implications underscore the need for intentional communication spaces in educational housing to foster inclusive and adaptive communities amid cultural diversity.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Culture Shock, Dormitory Life, Social Support, Intercultural Communication.

I. Introduction

Indonesia is a nation of remarkable cultural diversity, where internal migration for higher education is a common phenomenon. This migration often occurs across islands or between distinct ethnic backgrounds. Although it takes place within the same national borders, students frequently encounter adaptation challenges similar to those experienced in international contexts. Differences in language use, social etiquette, religious expression, and interpersonal norms can be stark. (Sumarlan et al., 2025). In such situations, culture shock—a psychological response to unfamiliar cultural environments—becomes almost inevitable. (Ali et al., 2022). This is particularly evident in the case of students from South Sumatra residing in Yogyakarta, who often find themselves immersed in a Javanese-dominated cultural environment that differs significantly from their own Minangkabau Malay heritage. This is evident in the case of students from South Sumatra residing in

Yogyakarta. Many of them transition from a Minangkabau Malay heritage into a Javanese-dominated cultural environment that differs significantly from their own. Culture shock, as defined by Oberg (1960) in Ellis et al (2024), refers to a state of disorientation and stress experienced when exposed to a vastly different culture. It typically unfolds in four stages: honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and adaptation. During the frustration stage, individuals may feel alienated, misunderstood, or emotionally drained when unable to interpret or align with prevailing cultural codes. For university students, these challenges are compounded by academic pressures, limited family support, and the absence of familiar social cues.

These conditions reveal a significant problem: internal migration in Indonesia exposes cultural gaps within the nation itself, yet there is limited structured support to help students navigate them. Without adequate coping mechanisms, students risk prolonged stress, diminished academic performance, and weakened social integration. Amid these challenges, interpersonal communication emerges as a pivotal factor. At its most basic level, it is the exchange of messages, emotions, and intentions between individuals. (Kim, 2012). However, in culturally discordant environments, it becomes much more—it serves as the medium through which individuals negotiate their identity, construct a sense of belonging, and alleviate anxiety caused by uncertainty. Students who establish meaningful relationships with peers, seniors, dormitory staff, or local community members are more likely to achieve emotional stability and social orientation. From a theoretical perspective, this research draws on two key frameworks. The Uncertainty Reduction Theory suggests that individuals are driven to seek information and predictability in new situations through communication. Increased interaction reduces anxiety and fosters a coherent understanding of the environment. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The Communication Accommodation Theory explains how individuals adapt their speech, behavior, and communication styles to either converge with or diverge from others. Together, these theories provide a lens for examining how South Sumatran students adjust their communicative behaviors to align with the dominant culture of Yogyakarta. (Giles et al., 1973; Mheidly et al., 2020).

Previous studies in Indonesia have predominantly examined international students or interethnic conflicts, leaving the internal cultural adaptation of domestic students underexplored. While the psychological effects of culture shock are documented, little is known about how communication practices actively mediate or alleviate these effects in structured communal settings such as dormitories. (Winkelman, 1994). The Sriwijaya Dormitory, which houses students from South Sumatra in Yogyakarta, offers a distinctive environment to observe these dynamics. Within its walls, adaptation is not only about cohabitation; it is a process of identity construction, belonging, and survival through daily communication. Based on this gap, the present study investigates the role of interpersonal communication in helping Sriwijaya Dormitory students navigate and overcome culture shock. It addresses three research questions: (1) How do students perceive their cultural transition upon arriving in Yogyakarta? (2) What interpersonal communication strategies do they use to cope with cultural stressors? (3) To what extent do these strategies foster emotional resilience and cultural adaptation? By answering these questions, this research provides deeper insights into the lived experience of cultural adaptation as shaped by dialogue, social interaction, and mutual support. The significance of this study lies in both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the field of intercultural communication by contextualizing Western frameworks within Indonesian intranational migration. Practically, the findings can inform intervention programs in student housing, such as culturally sensitive orientation sessions, peer mentoring schemes, and communication-based conflict mediation. In a higher education landscape that increasingly attracts students from diverse backgrounds, understanding the communicative dimensions of adaptation is not optional; it is essential for building inclusive, resilient, and academically successful student communities.

II.   Literature Review

The phenomenon of cultural adjustment has become a significant concern in the context of student mobility, including movements from one regional cultural environment to another within the same country. Although geographically domestic, such relocations can still trigger cultural dissonance commonly referred to as culture shock due to differences in language, values, customs, and social norms. Research indicates that even intranational migrations can generate considerable psychosocial strain and necessitate deliberate

adaptation efforts (Kim, 2020). Among students from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly those living in communal environments such as dormitories or hostels, interpersonal communication emerges as a critical element in the process of cultural accommodation. Interpersonal communication plays a vital role in bridging social and psychological gaps during cultural transitions. Gudykunst (2005) Highlights that uncertainty reduction and anxiety management through meaningful interpersonal interaction are essential for successful adaptation (Gudykunst, 2005; Khukhlaev et al., 2022). More recent studies emphasize that the quality, frequency, and openness of interpersonal dialogue are crucial in minimizing misperceptions, fostering empathy, and building a shared understanding. (Chen & Starosta, 2019; Neuliep, 2021). These elements are particularly important in student dormitories, where cultural identities are continuously negotiated through daily social encounters.

Cultural adjustment is not a linear process of assimilation; rather, it is a dynamic negotiation of identity and belonging. Students in such transitions often oscillate between preserving their cultural roots and embracing the dominant norms of their new environment. In this process, interpersonal communication serves as a mediating tool that enables both the expression and transformation of identity. Ting-Toomey (2021) and Arasaratnam-Smith (2020) Emphasize that effective interpersonal communication—characterized by active listening, emotional sensitivity, and contextual empathy—can buffer against alienation and reinforce a sense of inclusion. From a psychological perspective, interpersonal communication facilitates cognitive reframing, emotional regulation, and behavioral adjustment during cultural transitions. (Almukdad & Karadag, 2024). Open, respectful, and empathetic exchanges have been shown to promote intercultural competence and lower stress associated with cultural dislocation. (O'Dowd et al., 2020). In dormitory settings, peer-to-peer interactions function as both a support system and a learning platform for decoding cultural cues, developing adaptation strategies, and negotiating identity.

Studies on interpersonal dynamics in student housing reveal that the communication climate, power balance, and relational maintenance significantly shape the outcomes of cultural integration. A climate of mutual trust, shared engagement rules, and inclusive communication norms fosters psychological safety, allowing residents to discuss cultural differences openly. This aligns with Neuliep's (2021), finding that supportive interpersonal environments reduce defensive communication and encourage adaptive coping mechanisms. Structural and institutional supports—such as cultural orientation programs, peer mentoring, and dialogue-based mediation—further enhance adjustment processes. (Butt et al., 2023). The reviewed literature consistently supports the view that interpersonal communication functions as both a catalyst and a vehicle for successful cultural adjustment among students. However, most existing research focuses on international students or cross-national contexts, with limited exploration of intranational migration scenarios. This study addresses that gap by examining South Sumatran students in a Javanese-based dormitory, a domestic yet culturally diverse environment where adjustment remains a challenge. Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Berger and Calabrese, guides the discussion. (1975) And Communication Accommodation Theory, Gils et al. (1973) And Mheidly et al. (2020), which together provide a framework for understanding how communication strategies reduce uncertainty, build trust, and facilitate cultural convergence or divergence.

Table 1. Literature Map on Interpersonal Communication and Cultural Adjustment

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings	Relevance to Current Study
Kim (2020)	Intranational migration and cultural adaptation	Even domestic migration can cause cultural dissonance, requiring intentional adaptation.	Supports the premise that South Sumatran students in Yogyakarta face culture shock despite being in the same country
Gudykunst (2005, as cited in Khukhlaev et al., 2022)	Uncertainty reduction and anxiety management in intercultural communication	Meaningful interpersonal interaction reduces uncertainty and anxiety, aiding adaptation	Justifies the role of interpersonal communication in alleviating stress for dormitory students

Chen & Starosta (2019)	Interpersonal dialogue and empathy in intercultural contexts	Quality, frequency, and openness of dialogue foster empathy and minimize misperceptions	Highlights the mechanisms by which dormitory interactions promote adjustment
Neuliep (2021)	Interpersonal environments in intercultural adaptation	Supportive communication climates reduce defensiveness and encourage adaptive coping	Informs analysis of the dormitory as a communication climate affecting student well-being
Ting-Toomey (2021)	Identity negotiation in cultural transitions	Active listening, emotional sensitivity, and contextual empathy buffer against alienation	Strengthens the argument that communication helps balance identity preservation and adaptation
Arasaratnam-Smith (2020)	Inclusion through interpersonal communication	Effective communication fosters a sense of belonging and reduces cultural isolation.	Supports the idea that dormitory peers can foster inclusion for newcomers
Almukdad & Karadag (2024).	Psychological processes in cultural adjustment	Interpersonal communication aids cognitive reframing, emotional regulation, and behavioral change.	Provides a psychological basis for linking communication with resilience
O'Dowd et al. (2020).	Intercultural competence and stress reduction	Respectful and empathetic exchanges lower stress and improve competence	Shows the direct mental health benefits of adaptive communication
Butt et al. (2023).	Institutional strategies for cultural integration	Cultural orientation, peer mentoring, and mediation improve adjustment	Offers practical implications for dormitory management in the current study

III.   Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing a case study design, to investigate how interpersonal communication facilitates students' adaptation to culture shock within a male student dormitory in Yogyakarta. A qualitative approach was selected to gain a deep, contextualized understanding of lived experiences, subjective meanings, and communication patterns among students undergoing cultural adaptation. A case study method enables the researcher to examine a contemporary phenomenon, such as interpersonal communication, in a culturally diverse dormitory within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. (Mustafa, 1988; Yin, 2014). The research site was Asrama Putra Balai Sriwijaya Yogyakarta, a dormitory housing male students from South Sumatra who are pursuing higher education in Yogyakarta. This location was chosen due to its unique cultural composition, structured communal living arrangements, and active peer interactions. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling with two inclusion criteria: (1) active residency in the dormitory for at least six months, and (2) prior experience of cultural adjustment upon arrival.

Data were collected over two weeks through three complementary methods: (1) Semi-structured interviews, conducted in a quiet meeting room within the dormitory to ensure privacy and comfort. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. Questions explored themes such as communication patterns, emotional experiences, adaptation challenges, and the role of peer support. Interviews were conducted face-

to-face in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded using a digital recorder, and supplemented with field notes capturing nonverbal cues. (2) Field observations, conducted during communal activities (e.g., group meals, study sessions, and evening gatherings) to document spontaneous interpersonal exchanges and cultural negotiation in real time. (3) Document analysis, including internal dormitory regulations, event schedules, meeting minutes, and orientation materials. These documents provided contextual information on the institutional norms and communication expectations within the dormitory.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory guided the analytical process. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1973; Mheidly et al., 2020), selected for their ability to explain how individuals manage uncertainty, adapt communicative behaviors, and negotiate identity in culturally unfamiliar environments. These frameworks were applied during coding to interpret how participants' communication strategies aligned with or diverged from the theoretical constructs of the six-phase framework. (Setti et al., 2022). Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation (comparing interviews, observations, and documents), member checking (inviting participants to review and validate key interpretations), and reflective journaling to minimize researcher bias. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to participants, identifying details were removed from transcripts, and all data were stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher.

IV.   Results and Discussion

The analysis of field data revealed a multidimensional process through which South Sumatran students in Yogyakarta navigated their cultural transition, employed interpersonal communication strategies, and cultivated resilience. These findings are organized into three interrelated sections: perceptions of cultural transition, which outline students' initial reactions and meaning-making upon arrival; interpersonal communication strategies, which detail the deliberate and incidental ways students interacted to manage cultural stressors; and the role of these strategies in fostering emotional resilience and facilitating cultural adaptation. Presenting the results in this sequence enables a logical progression from initial experiences to adaptive mechanisms and their broader impacts, situating each theme within relevant intercultural communication theories.

4.1. Perceptions of Cultural Transition among South Sumatran Students in Yogyakarta

The findings reveal that a simultaneous sense of excitement and apprehension characterizes the cultural transition experienced by South Sumatran students upon arriving in Yogyakarta. While previous studies on student mobility in Indonesia have largely emphasized the challenges of adapting to urban lifestyles or academic demands, this research reveals a distinctive pattern in which cultural transition is primarily mediated through students' perceptions of interpersonal openness in the host environment. (Vishwanatha et al., 2021). The participants consistently described Yogyakarta as a socially welcoming city, yet one that required active engagement to navigate its nuanced linguistic, social, and behavioral norms. For instance, the initial encounter with the local dialect and indirect communication style created moments of uncertainty, compelling students to adopt observational strategies before initiating deeper interactions. This observation-first approach, rarely discussed in the literature on intra-national student mobility, underscores the significance of silent acclimatization as an initial adaptive mechanism.

Another salient finding lies in how students framed their early adaptation as a negotiation between maintaining cultural identity and embracing new social practices. While they appreciated the communal and egalitarian ethos prevalent in Yogyakarta, they also expressed an awareness of the subtle differences in humor, religious expression, and time orientation that influenced day-to-day interactions. These perceptions shaped their willingness to participate in collective activities such as community meals (*makan bersama*) or religious gatherings, which they saw as both cultural immersion opportunities and trust-building platforms. Unlike many studies focusing on international students, which often portray cultural shock as a disruptive experience, the narratives presented here indicate a more gradual and deliberate integration process marked by cognitive reframing, where differences are interpreted as learning opportunities rather than threats. This reframing not only reduced anxiety but also laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of

interpersonal communication strategies that would later facilitate emotional resilience and long-term adaptation (Jiang et al., 2021).

The novelty of this study lies in its illumination of intra-national cultural transition as a complex, multi-layered process that mirrors specific dynamics of cross-national adaptation yet operates within a shared national identity framework. By foregrounding students' own interpretations of their initial transition phase, this research extends the scope of cultural adaptation studies beyond the standard international–local binary. It highlights that even within a single country, regional diversity can produce adaptation challenges that are navigated through unique perceptual and behavioral pathways. This insight challenges the prevailing assumption that intra-national student movement is culturally seamless, calling for a more nuanced policy and programmatic response in student housing and orientation programs, particularly in multicultural educational hubs like Yogyakarta. Beyond the initial adjustment period, students' perceptions of Yogyakarta's cultural landscape evolved as they became more attuned to the implicit codes governing social interaction. Over time, they reported developing a heightened sensitivity to indirect cues, such as subtle shifts in tone, pauses in conversation, or nonverbal gestures, which often carried meanings not immediately apparent to outsiders. This semiotic awareness facilitated smoother communication and fostered a sense of cultural competence that went beyond linguistic proficiency. (Mahdalena et al., 2021). The adaptation process thus moved from a phase of surface-level observation to one of deeper interpretive engagement, where students began to anticipate and respond to unspoken social expectations with greater confidence. Such progression echoes the adaptive cycle described in Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, where experiential learning drives the transition from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative orientation.

A key dimension emerging from the narratives is the role of mutuality in shaping the trajectory of adaptation. (Augustina Izehiuw & Atinuke Titilope, 2024). While students actively sought to understand and respect the host culture, they also described moments where peers and residents reciprocally acknowledged their own cultural expressions. For example, sharing traditional South Sumatran dishes during communal events or explaining regional customs in informal conversations served not only as acts of cultural exchange but also as validation of their identity within the host community. This reciprocal recognition reduced feelings of marginalization and reinforced the perception of Yogyakarta as an inclusive environment. Importantly, these exchanges were not merely symbolic; they contributed to the building of relational trust and the co-construction of a shared intercultural space that accommodated multiple identities. (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020; Ravasi et al., 2020). The cumulative effect of these perceptual shifts was a redefinition of what it meant to "belong" in the host environment. Rather than conceiving adaptation as a process of cultural replacement, students increasingly viewed it as an ongoing negotiation between self and context, where maintaining one's heritage identity was compatible with integrating into new social systems. This integrative stance enabled them to participate more fully in campus and community life without experiencing a sense of cultural loss. Furthermore, it provided a foundation for the development of interpersonal communication strategies that would later be instrumental in navigating conflicts, bridging misunderstandings, and sustaining long-term well-being in the dormitory setting. (Kenter et al., 2019). The trajectory outlined here suggests that perceptions of cultural transition are not static impressions formed upon arrival but dynamic constructs shaped by iterative cycles of observation, interaction, and reflection.

4.2. Interpersonal Communication Strategies for Navigating Cultural Stressors

The analysis reveals that South Sumatran students employ a repertoire of interpersonal communication strategies to navigate cultural stressors during their early adaptation in Yogyakarta. Rather than relying solely on formal orientation programs or language training, these students demonstrate a preference for informal, relationship-driven approaches. Establishing dyadic trust with local peers emerged as the primary gateway for integrating into broader social networks, thereby easing cultural navigation (Coutrot et al., 2018). This trust was often cultivated through low-stakes, casual conversations, such as discussing culinary preferences, local festivities, or shared academic challenges, which created space for gradual disclosure and mutual understanding. Such micro-level relational scaffolding played a crucial role in reducing feelings of isolation, particularly in the first six months of their settlement. Selective participation in cultural rituals and community gatherings was another prominent strategy. Students engaged in activities such as

pengajian (religious study groups), *gotong royong* (communal work), and *makan bersama* (shared meals) not merely for cultural immersion but as opportunities for interpersonal bonding. These gatherings acted as "social accelerators," compressing the time needed to transition from peripheral observers to active community members. (Arif et al., 2022). Unlike the more passive observational approach seen in initial transitions, this phase involved deliberate efforts to initiate dialogue, offer assistance, and find shared values with residents. Through such engagements, students developed what they described as "cultural empathy," enabling them to interpret local norms as reflections of deeper cultural values rather than as mere behavioral rules. (Assoratgoon & Kantabutra, 2023).

A further distinctive practice observed was adaptive code-switching between formal Indonesian and local Javanese phrases during daily interactions. This linguistic flexibility served not only as a practical communication tool but also as a symbolic expression of respect, which significantly reduced interpersonal barriers. While code-switching is well-documented in multilingual contexts, its strategic application within an intra-national mobility setting where regional languages carry strong cultural identities has been less explored. In this context, code-switching facilitated both emotional warmth and openness in intercultural exchanges, thereby facilitating a smoother adaptation process. (Fantini, 2020). Overall, these findings demonstrate that interpersonal communication in intra-national migration contexts is mediated through nuanced relational tactics that align with specific cultural stressors, such as linguistic unfamiliarity, social norm ambiguity, and challenges to trust-building. By connecting these strategies to measurable adaptation outcomes, the study enriches the understanding of communicative adaptation beyond the conventional focus on international mobility. This perspective offers practical insights for developing culturally responsive student support systems in a diverse domestic educational environment.

Another dimension that emerged strongly from the narratives is the role of peer mentoring within student dormitories and religious organizations. Senior students from South Sumatra often acted as cultural intermediaries, helping newcomers interpret subtle social cues and providing guidance on how to respond appropriately in different contexts. This informal mentoring system not only reduced uncertainty but also created a sense of solidarity rooted in shared regional identity. Importantly, these mentoring relationships extended beyond pragmatic advice to emotional reassurance, allowing new students to feel that their struggles were normalized and manageable. Such dynamics illustrate how interpersonal communication can serve as both a survival tool and a vehicle for identity preservation within a culturally diverse setting. In addition to peer mentoring, humor proved to be a subtle yet powerful strategy for mitigating cultural stress. Students reported that sharing jokes, especially those that blended South Sumatran humor with Javanese wordplay, helped to ease tensions and foster inclusivity in mixed groups. Humor functioned as a bridge across cultural differences, creating a low-risk environment where misunderstandings could be reframed as moments of learning rather than sources of conflict. This aligns with intercultural communication scholarship that positions humor as a relational lubricant, particularly effective in reducing anxiety and promoting relational closeness in contexts of cultural ambiguity. The integration of humor thus reflects a creative adaptation mechanism that is rarely highlighted in intra-national migration studies.

Family communication also played a paradoxical role in shaping students' adaptation trajectories. On the one hand, frequent contact with family back home provided emotional support and reassurance, acting as a buffer against the loneliness of cultural transition. On the other hand, students acknowledged that excessive reliance on family communication could delay their engagement with the host culture, as it reinforced a psychological tether to their home environment. Navigating this balance required deliberate communication choices, where students gradually reduced dependency on long-distance family contact to prioritize local relationship-building. This delicate negotiation underscores the strategic dimension of communication in regulating both emotional comfort and cultural engagement. The findings suggest that the communication strategies employed by South Sumatran students reflect an evolving trajectory from dependence to autonomy in adaptation. Initially, students leaned heavily on regional peers for translation of norms and emotional safety. Over time, however, they increasingly engaged in direct dialogue with residents, participated more actively in community initiatives, and initiated conversations in culturally appropriate ways. This developmental trajectory demonstrates that interpersonal communication strategies are not static but dynamically calibrated to the shifting demands of adaptation. The progression highlights how communication acts not merely as a tool for coping but as a transformative mechanism that redefines students' sense of belonging in a multicultural urban environment like Yogyakarta.

4.3. The Role of Communication in Fostering Emotional Resilience and Cultural Adaptation

The data indicate that communication plays a pivotal role in shaping the emotional resilience of South Sumatran students and accelerating their cultural adaptation in Yogyakarta. Emotional resilience in this context refers to the ability to maintain psychological stability while navigating unfamiliar cultural norms, managing homesickness, and confronting instances of perceived social distance. (Pahwa & Khan, 2022). Students who engaged in sustained interpersonal communication, particularly those who cultivated supportive peer relationships, demonstrated greater capacity to reframe cultural challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as insurmountable obstacles. Supportive communication networks, both within the South Sumatran student community and with local peers, acted as emotional buffers against the stressors of adaptation. Informal peer counselling, storytelling about shared experiences, and humor in daily interactions helped reduce anxiety and promote a sense of belonging. (Zhang, 2022). Students emphasized that verbal affirmation from peers, such as acknowledging their progress in language use or integration into community life, significantly reinforced their self-confidence. This reinforcement translated into a stronger willingness to participate in culturally embedded activities, thereby deepening their adaptation.

Cultural adaptation was not solely an outcome of passive exposure to local customs but was actively constructed through dialogic engagement. (Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2021). By asking questions, seeking clarification, and exchanging perspectives on cultural norms, students expanded their interpretive frameworks and reduced the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings. This dialogic process enabled them to adopt a flexible identity position, retaining elements of their South Sumatran heritage while integrating selected aspects of Javanese cultural practices. Such bicultural fluency was identified as a protective factor in maintaining emotional stability, as it allowed students to navigate social spaces without feeling pressured to abandon their original identity. The role of empathy in communication proved to be particularly significant. (Schoofs et al., 2019). Students who demonstrated cultural empathy, expressing a genuine interest in local traditions, foodways, and language, were more readily accepted by local peers, which further reinforced their adaptation trajectory. In turn, this mutual acceptance cultivated a virtuous cycle: as trust and cultural familiarity increased, emotional resilience strengthened, which encouraged further adaptive engagement.

These patterns underscore that communication in intra-national cultural transitions functions not merely as an exchange of information, but as a dynamic resource for sustaining psychological well-being and enabling cultural integration. (Baker, 2022). The evidence suggests that resilience and adaptation are co-constructed through iterative communicative acts that bridge personal emotional needs and collective cultural norms. By situating communication as both a coping mechanism and a transformative process, this perspective extends current understandings of adaptation beyond linear models, highlighting its cyclical and relational nature. Another salient finding relates to the role of narrative sharing as a means of fostering resilience. Students frequently engaged in recounting their personal adaptation journeys to peers, framing initial struggles with language barriers, homesickness, or misinterpretations of social cues as collective experiences rather than individual shortcomings. This narrative practice not only normalized challenges but also functioned as a cognitive reframing strategy, allowing students to perceive setbacks as temporary and surmountable. In this sense, communication functioned as both a therapeutic and pedagogical tool: therapeutic in alleviating feelings of isolation, and pedagogical in conveying tacit strategies for navigating cultural transitions.

Digital communication also emerged as an important extension of resilience-building. Platforms such as WhatsApp groups and social media communities provided spaces where students could seek immediate support, share resources, and maintain a sense of continuity with their cultural roots while simultaneously engaging with their host environment. These digital interactions blurred the boundaries between physical and virtual communities, ensuring that students remained emotionally anchored even when facing stressors in daily offline encounters. However, the findings suggest that students who balanced digital support with active face-to-face communication reported higher levels of resilience, indicating a complementary rather than substitutive role for digital channels in adaptation. Religious communication practices added another crucial layer to students' emotional stability. Participation in *pengajian* (religious study groups), Friday prayers, and informal discussions about faith not only reinforced their spiritual grounding but also provided structured

opportunities for emotional expression and communal reassurance. Religion thus became a communicative resource through which resilience was cultivated, as shared rituals and discourses framed adaptation within a larger narrative of spiritual growth and divine testing. This dimension highlights the intersection of cultural adaptation with moral and religious identity, which further strengthened the students' sense of purpose and belonging in Yogyakarta's diverse sociocultural environment. The progression of resilience was shown to be cumulative and relational, with communication practices evolving in tandem with students' adaptation. Early reliance on emotionally supportive conversations gradually shifted toward more complex intercultural dialogues, where students took on active roles as cultural mediators, helping newer arrivals or explaining their own traditions to Javanese peers. This shift indicates that resilience is not merely an individual attribute but a socially constructed process sustained through ongoing communicative reciprocity. In other words, communication not only enabled South Sumatran students to endure cultural challenges but also empowered them to contribute to the cultural ecology of their host community, completing the cycle from adaptation to active participation.

Table 2. Communication Practices, Emotional Resilience Outcomes, and Cultural Adaptation Trajectories

Communication Practices	Emotional Resilience Outcomes	Cultural Adaptation Trajectories
Narrative Sharing (storytelling about adaptation struggles and successes)	Normalization of challenges; reframing struggles as collective rather than individual; reduction of isolation	Strengthened peer solidarity; accelerated learning of coping strategies
Digital Communication (WhatsApp groups, social media communities)	Immediate emotional support; continuity with home culture; reduced anxiety	Balanced integration between virtual and offline communities; facilitated smoother transitions
Religious Communication (pengajian, prayers, informal faith-based discussions)	Spiritual grounding; communal reassurance; sense of divine purpose	Anchored identity during adaptation; enhanced belonging in multicultural settings
Empathic Dialogue (active listening, cultural empathy, humor, affirmation)	Increased self-confidence; emotional affirmation; reduced anxiety	Expanded participation in cultural activities; growth of bicultural fluency
Code-Switching (Indonesian ↔ Javanese phrases)	Emotional warmth; symbolic respect; reduced social tension	Deeper acceptance by local peers; smoother daily interactions
Reciprocal Intercultural Mediation (helping newcomers, explaining traditions).	Transformation from passive to active coping; strengthened emotional agency.	Movement from adaptation to active participation in the host community.

V.   Conclusion

This study reveals that the cultural transition experienced by South Sumatran students in Yogyakarta is a multi-layered process shaped by both individual agency and the social environments that mediate adaptation. The early phase of arrival is often characterized by confusion, emotional discomfort, and uncertainty, reflecting a natural response to encountering unfamiliar cultural codes, norms, and interactional patterns. Rather than representing a fixed barrier, these early challenges function as a transformative entry point, prompting students to engage in reflective meaning-making and active learning. This trajectory suggests that the disorientation of initial contact is not merely disruptive but can become a catalyst for expanded intercultural awareness.

Interpersonal communication was found to be the primary adaptive mechanism through which students navigated cultural stressors and developed a sense of belonging. Both structured forms, such as organized peer mentoring and unstructured daily exchanges in dormitory life, provided emotional reassurance, practical guidance, and opportunities for perspective-taking. These interactions aligned with established theoretical models of cultural adaptation, demonstrating how trust-building and anxiety-reduction occur through sustained dialogue. By adjusting language, tone, and behavioral cues, students not only acquired intercultural competence but also reshaped their personal identities within a more pluralistic frame of reference.

The findings underscore that cultural adaptation in educational migration contexts should not be understood as a unidirectional process of assimilation, but as a negotiated co-construction of shared cultural spaces. For practice, dormitory administrators and policymakers should design intentional communication spaces, foster peer mentoring networks, and integrate intercultural learning into student support services. For future research, longitudinal studies could examine the sustainability of adaptive communication strategies over time, while comparative analyses across different cultural groups may reveal whether these mechanisms are universal or context-dependent. Further investigation into the intersection of digital communication and intercultural adaptation could also provide valuable insights, particularly as online platforms increasingly shape students' social integration experiences.

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