



The Meaning of Cross-Cultural Communication Experience of International Students on Pesantren-Based Campuses

Makna Pengalaman Komunikasi Lintas Budaya Mahasiswa Internasional di Kampus Berbasis Pesantren

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine the cross-cultural experiences of international students at Darussalam Gontor University in Indonesia. The study focuses on the interrelated themes of identity, language, and communication, and seeks to gain insight into how students from a range of countries, including Sudan, Chad, Turkey, and Thailand, experience life at this boarding university. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was employed by researchers, who conducted in-depth interviews and observations to gain insight into the experiences of these students. The findings indicate that identity is shaped by a process of comparison with others, driven by a desire to understand one's group. Language, particularly Arabic and English, plays a pivotal role, in supporting academic and social activities. However, students also engage in voluntary learning of Indonesian to enhance their interactions with the local population. Communication was identified as a crucial aspect of self-concept, self-actualization, happiness, and stress relief.

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas pengalaman mahasiswa asing di universitas berbasis pesantren di Indonesia dari perspektif komunikasi lintas budaya, khususnya di Universitas Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA). Penelitian ini berfokus pada makna identitas, bahasa, dan tindakan komunikatif mahasiswa dari negara seperti Sudan, Chad, Turki, dan Thailand. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Peneliti melakukan wawancara mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna identitas bagi mahasiswa internasional terbentuk melalui perbandingan sosial dengan kelompok lain, didorong oleh keinginan untuk memahami kelompoknya. Bahasa Arab dan Inggris berperan penting dalam aktivitas akademik dan sosial sehari-hari mereka, sementara pembelajaran bahasa Indonesia dilakukan secara sukarela untuk mempermudah interaksi dengan mahasiswa lokal. Tindakan komunikasi juga ditemukan sebagai komponen utama yang membantu mahasiswa internasional membangun konsep diri, mencapai aktualisasi diri, merasakan kebahagiaan, serta mengurangi tekanan hidup.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses how international students experience life at dormitory-based universities in Indonesia from the perspective of intercultural communication. The international students in question are students from abroad who study and live in boarding universities in Indonesia. It is known that in Indonesia, many universities also provide dormitories for their students. Some include IPDN (Institute of Internal Government) or Akpol (Police Academy). However, well-known public and private campuses also have dormitories for students.

Several universities in Indonesia provide dormitory facilities for their students. Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) offers dormitories for students, particularly those from outside Yogyakarta (www.ugm.ac.id), with a focus on soft skills development, leadership training, and TOEFL tests. Padjadjaran University (Unpad) provides dormitories mainly for first-year students receiving *Bidikmisi* funding (www.unpad.ac.id), while Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) offers dorms for students from outside Solo, equipped with facilities like canteens and meeting rooms (www.uns.ac.id).

Jakarta State University (UNJ) has dorms for underprivileged and regional students, offering activities such as sports and religious events (www.unj.ac.id). Telkom University requires students to live in dorms during their first two semesters, participating in training or seminars (www.telkomuniversity.ac.id). The University of Darussalam Gontor stands out as a boarding-based institution, emphasizing its unique combination of higher education and pesantren tradition (www.UNIDAgontor.ac.id).

The rapid progress of the pesantren and its brilliant achievements soon led to the establishment of a world-class Islamic university. Their desire was manifested by establishing Islamic higher education institutions that could produce sincere and authoritative Muslim scholars (*ulama*). The first attempt made by the founders after the school first graduated in 1942 was

to establish higher education which was later called *Underbow* and *Bovenbow*. However, the program could no longer continue due to the colonial situation and war.

Quoting page (www.UNIDAgontor.ac.id), thus in the 1958 Waqf Charter of the Modern Islamic Education Institute Darussalam, they explained, among others, that the school is no longer their private property because it now belongs to the Waqf for Muslim Ummah, and that the school should be further developed into an Islamic university and become a significant center for Arabic and Islamic Studies.

In dormitory settings where Indonesian citizens and international students coexist, the dynamics of cultural adjustment and identity formation are particularly pronounced. Since the 1950s, scholars have explored how individuals adapt to new "host cultures" and what happens upon their return home (Martin & Nakayama, 2018). Findings suggest that adjustment typically follows a pattern: initial happiness leads to culture shock, recovery, and eventual adaptation, a cycle that often repeats when individuals return home. Recent research has increasingly focused on the role of social identity in these cross-cultural experiences.

Social identity becomes more salient when individuals compare themselves with other groups, driven by a desire to view their group positively. This comparison is particularly significant when language serves as a marker of group distinctiveness (Jackson, 2012). In such contexts, individuals adjust both verbal and nonverbal communication to construct and maintain a favorable identity, which is essential for smooth interactions with others. Similarities and differences can be highlighted through phonetic, paralinguistic, and nonverbal cues, which help individuals navigate their identities in cross-cultural settings. The recognition and interpretation of these communicative methods ultimately affect the effectiveness of language strategies and future interactions.

According to Lave and Wenger's (1991) learning theory, individuals acquire

knowledge and skills as they engage in the practices of language communities, leading to changes in their relationships and identities over time. Participating in a national-host community requires acculturation through adopting normative behaviors and symbolic competence, expanding the repertoire of identities individuals can choose from, thus influencing their effectiveness in managing identity during intercultural communication. Identity can be complex, as individuals may embrace different ethnolinguistic identities. In settings with ongoing intercultural contact, it is common for people to enter without prior knowledge of the target culture or an understanding of how to communicate effectively with its members. Researchers must consider individuals' exposure to the target language and culture, interactions with local speakers, and the adoption of social values—all factors that contribute to their ethnolinguistic hybridity. This hybridity can be interpreted in various ways depending on the context (Samovar et al., 2010).

Cross-cultural psychologist Alan Roland (1988) identified three universal aspects of identity, namely individual identity, family identity, and spiritual identity. Cultural groups tend to emphasize one or two of these dimensions while downplaying others. Individual identity reflects a sense of self that is often emphasized in individualistic societies, like the United States, where independence is highly valued. In contrast, family identity, common in collectivist societies, underscores emotional connectedness and interdependence. Spiritual identity varies in its significance among different individuals. National identity is distinct from racial or ethnic identity, as it relates to a person's legal status concerning a nation. National identity is influenced by numerous factors, with Benedict Anderson (1983) describing it as an "imagined community" where people connect with others in their nation (Liu et al., 2015). Communication plays a crucial role in building national identity, especially during significant occasions.

International students in pesantren-based campuses face cultural adaptation

challenges, particularly with the dynamic and diverse Indonesian culture. They often interact with peers from various regions of Indonesia, enriching their experiences (Setiawan et al., 2022). However, social tensions may arise from language differences between their home country and Indonesia. Each cross-cultural communication situation, including those involving these students, is perceived differently regarding nonverbal communication behavior. When students reach a stage of adaptation, they often find nonverbal communication, such as gestures and expressions, easier to navigate than verbal communication. Notably, their sense of pride or nationalism remains intact despite experiencing cultural clashes, such as participating in events where national songs like "Indonesia Raya" are sung.

Regional identities also play a significant role in shaping cultural interactions. Various regions have unique cultural identities that reflect specific foods, clothing, behaviors, and languages. These identities can be critical in intercultural communication contexts. The primary function of identity is to provide meaning and serve as a source of self-definition. Identities help individuals organize meaning around their self-concept (Castells, 2011). They serve as a foundation for meaning largely due to their origins, influenced by geography, history, religion, and other factors. Identities take many forms depending on the time and situation, allowing individuals to identify with nations, states, regions, religions, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, and professions. A person's identity significantly impacts how they perceive and behave in the world (Samovar, 2017).

Culture shapes the moral, ethical, and aesthetic aspects of societal interactions, emerging from community agreements that become habits or traditions. It manifests through behaviors, language, tools, social organization, religion, art, and more, all aiding social life. Cultural diversity stems from a country's history and geography, leading to different customs and values across communities. As people with different cultures interact to meet their needs, cross-cultural

communication arises, involving direct contact between individuals with distinct behaviors and lifestyles. This communication highlights how cultural differences influence the exchange of ideas and behaviors during interactions. However, not all individuals can accept cultural differences that cause cross-cultural communication to run ineffectively, and individuals must have some cross-cultural competencies to achieve effective cross-cultural communication (Jandt, 2017).

The following are some previous studies on cross-cultural communication experiences. The study Wang et al., (2024) addresses the significant yet understudied role of emotions, specifically oral communication apprehension (OCA), in the academic performance of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students. Despite the growing recognition of the impact of emotions on learning outcomes in positive psychology, there has been limited focus on how these emotions affect EAP students. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the levels, causes, and coping strategies of OCA among 1618 Chinese and Iranian EAP students. The findings underscore the importance of addressing emotional factors in EAP settings and provide valuable insights for EAP teachers, students, and teacher trainers about the critical role emotions play in language learning.

Another study explored the acculturation and psychological adjustment of international students. This research examines the challenges faced by foreign students (Nailevna, 2017), particularly from Central Asia, attending Russian universities amid the ongoing global trend of intercultural mixing and student exchange. Focusing on the cultural shock these students experience during their first year at the Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University. The study aims to identify the environmental stressors that contribute to their acculturative stress. By understanding these challenges, the study seeks to develop effective strategies to help students manage and mitigate the stress associated with adapting to a new cultural environment.

The findings indicate that most international students experience varying degrees of cultural shock during their first year of study. The study highlights the crucial role of the university, especially the faculty, in mitigating acculturative stress by providing ongoing support and guidance to culturally diverse students. Well-organized teaching methods and the involvement of foreign students in social activities are shown to significantly improve their psychological adjustment. This research not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of acculturative stress but also provides practical insights for educators working with foreign students, emphasizing the importance of institutional support in promoting successful adjustment.

Froese et al.'s study investigated the relationship between intercultural communication and the cross-cultural adjustment of foreign workers in South Korea (Froese et al., 2012). As globalization continues to increase the mobility of labor, understanding how foreign workers adapt to new cultural environments has become essential. This study examines how various factors, such as host country language proficiency, workplace use of English, communication and conflict styles, and social interactions with host country nationals (HCNs), influence the general, work, and interaction adjustment of 125 foreign workers in South Korea. In addition, the study examines how these factors affect job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

The results indicate that proficiency in the host country's language and frequent social interactions with HCNs positively influence general and interaction adjustment and help foreign workers better integrate into South Korean society. In contrast, the use of English in the workplace and matching communication and conflict styles are more important for work-specific adjustment and attitudes. These findings underscore the importance of both language proficiency and intercultural communication styles in facilitating successful cross-cultural adjustment and enhancing job satisfaction among foreign workers. The study provides valuable insights for organizations in South

Korea and other host countries on how to support the integration and well-being of their foreign employees.

Yano (2014) examines the evolving role of English in facilitating communication across different cultural and ethnic backgrounds in an increasingly globalized world. The advent of advanced transportation and communication technologies has contributed to the growth of multicultural societies, particularly in urban metropolitan areas. This shift has resulted in the emergence of multicultural individuals who navigate diverse discourse communities and assume multiple social roles and identities. This paper examines how these individuals engage in cross-cultural communication, frequently utilizing English as a shared medium to overcome cultural barriers.

The significance of cultural, ethnic, and religious differences persists, often emphasized by a growing awareness of identity. This paper argues for re-examining cross-cultural communication, especially focusing on the role of English. English not only serves as a lingua franca but also helps negotiate and understand cultural differences. The study underscores the dual role of English in connecting diverse communities while navigating the complexities of shared cultural elements, making it essential for global interactions.

This research examines the cross-cultural communication experiences of international students at pesantren-based universities, focusing on how these experiences shape their identities at Universitas Darussalam Gontor. It seeks to uncover the meaning of language as a representation of cross-cultural communication among international students and to analyze the communicative acts in their intercultural interactions at the university. By doing so, the study aims to provide insights into how international students navigate identity and communication within the context of their unique educational environment.

Previous research (Nailevna, 2017) such as on international students at Kazan Federal University, has highlighted the importance of institutional support for acculturation and psychological adjustment. However, this study

emphasizes language's role in daily academic and social interactions. It explores the use of Arabic and English, as well as international students' voluntary adoption of Indonesian, even when not required.

In contrast to studies on foreign workers in South Korea, which emphasize host-country language proficiency for cross-cultural adjustment, this research demonstrates how communicative actions shape self-concept and well-being. The study builds on Yano's work on English as an international language, showing how both English and Arabic function as bridges in the unique pesantren-based academic environment. This localized context deepens our understanding of how language and culture are negotiated, and identities formed in this specific educational setting.

Pesantren-based campuses blend traditional Islamic education with modern academic environments, providing a unique platform for cross-cultural adaptation and integration. Acculturation, the process of modifying one's culture through contact with other groups, plays a significant role here. Students in pesantren are disciplined in learning both Arabic and English, essential for their academic and social activities. This dual language environment supports cross-cultural communication, where learning and adaptation occur both ways—students absorb the local culture while also contributing to it.

Cross-cultural communication serves both personal and social functions (Risaldy, 2019). On a personal level, it helps individuals recognize their social identity, integrating into a broader community while learning about other cultures. Socially, it allows for mutual supervision, cultural exchange, and the socialization of values. Through communication, individuals bridge cultural gaps, promoting understanding and social cohesion. In pesantren, Arabic is central to religious and academic learning, while English facilitates broader international communication. Interestingly, international students are not required to learn Indonesian but often do so out of personal motivation. This is a significant

departure from more traditional pesantren settings, where learning the local language might be more emphasized. The research calls for further investigation into how language requirements differ between modern and traditional pesantren and how these differences impact the cross-cultural experiences of international students.

The pesantren tradition has a rich intellectual history, which plays a role in shaping the identity of these institutions. This history is often reflected in the naming of buildings and dormitories, symbolizing the transmission of ideas and values over time. Intellectual history helps us understand the cultural identity of pesantren, which blends traditional Islamic values with contemporary academic practices. This study offers a localized perspective on cross-cultural communication by examining how international students at pesantren-based campuses navigate language, identity, and communication. The use of Arabic and English plays a crucial role in their academic and social lives, reflecting both religious traditions and modern global interactions. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how cross-cultural adaptation occurs in a unique educational setting, offering insights into the broader processes of cultural negotiation and identity formation in a globalized world.

Each of these studies provides a foundation for exploring the cross-cultural experiences of students in diverse educational settings. The study offers a novel perspective on the cross-cultural communication experiences of international students enrolled in pesantren-based campuses. It examines identity, language, and communicative actions within the context of a unique cultural setting.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach (Denzin, 2010) to explore the lived experiences of international students at pesantren-based campuses. The phenomenological approach focuses on understanding how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences,

making it particularly suitable for investigating the cultural adjustments and identity formation of these students. By delving into their subjective experiences, the study aims to capture the essence of their intercultural interactions and personal growth.

The research follows a systematic step process (Creswell, 2013). The first step is identifying the research problem, which centers on the cultural adjustment of international students in pesantren settings. This stage defines the focus and scope of the study. The second step involves conducting a literature review, and examining cross-cultural adjustment and identity theories to build a solid theoretical foundation and highlight gaps in existing knowledge. The third step is defining the research intent, ensuring that the objectives are clearly outlined and aligned with the study's goals. In the fourth stage, data collection is performed using triangulation, incorporating observation, interviews, and documentation. Passive observation captures students' natural interactions, while semi-structured interviews provide in-depth insights into their experiences. Documentation offers additional context and support for the findings. The fifth step is data analysis and interpretation, where key themes and patterns are identified to understand students' intercultural communication and identity shifts. Finally, the sixth step is reporting and evaluation, where the research findings are synthesized into a cohesive narrative, and the research process is critically assessed to ensure transparency and rigor.

The study focuses on international students at the University of Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA), with six participants from diverse countries such as Sudan, Chad, Thailand, and Turkey. The selection of students from different continents, including Asia, Africa, and Europe, ensures a broad representation of cultural backgrounds. The research is conducted at the Siman, Ponorogo campus, chosen for its strategic location and proximity to Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. Through this phenomenological approach, the study seeks to uncover the deep, personal experiences of students as they

navigate life in a new cultural and educational environment.

Results and Discussion

Three primary topics are covered in the following description of international students' experiences at Unida Gontor: the significance of their status as international students, the function of language in intercultural communication, and communicative behaviours in intercultural communication.

The Meaning of International Student Identity at UNIDA

Identity plays a crucial role in intercultural communication, serving as a bridge between culture and communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2018). It encompasses shared values rather than just superficial attributes like skin color or religion. While national identity often intertwines with race and religion, international students frequently navigate various identities. Their status as international students can become a prominent aspect of their social environment, subjecting them to various stereotypes (Matera & Catania, 2021).

Interviews with international students residing in dormitories at Darussalam Gontor University reveal diverse adaptation experiences. A 27-year-old Sudanese student, motivated by a readiness to learn, pursued undergraduate education despite being older than most classmates. His initial challenges stemmed from adjusting to the time and climate differences between Sudan and Indonesia. He remarked, "I am used to the adaptations during the learning period because I am prepared for all the consequences of differences" (Mubarok, Sudan, personal interview, 28 May, 2023).

Before enrolling at UNIDA Gontor, two students from Sudan and Chad spent 3.5 years in Rangkasbitung, Lebak, studying under scholarships focused on memorizing the Quran and Hadith. They prioritized their education without concerns about finances. The Sudanese student enrolled in the Tarbiyah faculty for Arabic Language Education, while the Chad student continued into a master's program. Three Turkish students, each

with educational backgrounds from different pesantren, also shared their experiences. They chose UNIDA based on recommendations from their teachers, drawn to its Islamic environment and Arabic and English instruction. Adaptation for these Turkish students centered around food preferences and climate differences. While the weather in Turkey is relatively cold, Ponorogo is notably hot, creating an adjustment challenge. One student struggled with the food, as bread is a staple in Turkey, whereas rice is served at every meal in Indonesia. Fortunately, the campus provides facilities like a family kitchen to ease this transition.

Chadian students noted a straightforward adaptation process, primarily regarding the weather and food sweetness in Java. They found the practice of mixing sweet soy sauce in meals particularly strange. Despite these challenges, the friendliness of Indonesian students facilitated a quicker adaptation. Campus helpers assist international students in socializing and adjusting, with volunteers recruited by the university. One helper, Edo, a student from Palembang, supported the Turkish students during interviews, ensuring they felt comfortable.

The research findings lead to three main practical implications (Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018). First, teachers should impart cultural knowledge while teaching intercultural topics, encouraging students to engage with cultural questions and share their experiences. Activities like cultural field trips can enrich students' understanding of micro and macro sociocultural contexts. International students are also part of a community called foreign consulates, engaging in various formal and informal activities to enhance their cultural understanding. Each student carries their own identity, with the adaptation period allowing them to interpret their identities within the broader cultural landscape. A Thai student noted that living in Indonesia has expanded her social connections, allowing her to engage with diverse cultures from across the country.

Identity can be dual, with individuals often claiming multiple ethnolinguistic identities, especially in contexts marked by

intercultural contact. The study emphasizes the need to understand the social dynamics that differentiate intercultural interactions from intracultural ones, as cultural concepts have varying interpretations across disciplines (Jackson, 2012). An interesting aspect of the study at a pesantren-based campus like UNIDA is the annual introduction week, allowing students to express their cultural identities. Activities like *Khutbatul Arsy* and *Al-Hamra* provide platforms for students to showcase their cultural heritage. For example, Sudanese students participate in *Al-Hamra* by reciting Arabic verses, interacting joyfully with other cultural identities.

International students also partake in formal events, including ceremonies during the introduction week. Students from Sudan and Chad felt comfortable participating in all activities, even singing the national anthem, which helped them connect with their Indonesian peers. In contrast, Turkish students had limited experiences with such events during interviews. The introduction week, featuring *Khutbatul Arsy* and *Al-Hamra* are vital for the cultural immersion of international students in Indonesia. The diverse backgrounds of UNIDA students enrich this experience, enabling international students to learn about Indonesian culture while sharing their own. This interplay is essential for branding both their identities and the country's cultural identity (Wulandari et al., 2022).

Identity becomes more prominent through social comparisons, with language serving as a marker of group identity. Individuals often adapt their verbal and nonverbal styles to foster positive identities and manage social distances with others (Jackson, 2012). These dynamic underscores the importance of identity in shaping intercultural communication and understanding.

Language as a Communication Tool

Language is closely tied to culture and identity, particularly in the pesantren world, where Arabic holds religious and educational significance. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis explains the importance of

religion to culture, as demonstrated by the influence of Islam on Arabic. The Qur'an is the standard for Arabic grammar, and its spread through Islam has made Arabic a crucial language for Muslims worldwide. All Muslims, regardless of nationality, use Arabic in daily prayers, which further ties language to religious identity.

Furthermore, language plays a vital role in national identity. Jacob Grimm, a pioneer of comparative linguistics, once said that a nation is defined by the people who speak the same language (Martin & Nakayama, 2013). In pesantren, the use of Arabic and English reflects the integration of religious and academic identities, shaping how students interact within this unique cultural setting (Halualani, 2019). Culture and communication are inherently linked. Sherzer (1987) suggests that culture is an organization of people sharing rules for behavior, and language serves as a medium that reflects and communicates this shared participation (Damayanti et al., 2019). In pesantren, language not only reflects the cultural group but also shapes it, as students navigate their dual identities as both international students and participants in an Islamic educational tradition.

Language, in the context of cross-cultural communication experiences for international students at Universitas Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA), is more than a communication tool; it embodies cultural identity, adaptation, and power dynamics within the academic and social environment. At UNIDA, Arabic and English are the primary languages for academic and social interactions, reflecting the institution's Islamic educational background. For international students from Arabic-speaking countries like Sudan, Arabic eases their adaptation process and fosters a sense of belonging, acting as both cultural capital and a bridge to deeper academic engagement.

Intercultural communication is increasingly vital in our globalized world. Researchers highlight that mere knowledge of a language does not equate to understanding individuals from different cultures. The language experiences of international students at UNIDA are unique, shaped by its pesantren

background, which emphasizes Arabic and English. Instead of relying on Indonesian, these students find adaptation facilitated through Arabic. Take, for instance, Sudanese students who have a strong foundation in Arabic. Many memorize the Quran from a young age and study in traditional Islamic schools, such as Gunduman Sudan. After their studies, they attend Ma'had Imam Al-Bukhari, focusing on Hadith, and then come to UNIDA with scholarships due to their academic achievements. This prior experience makes the transition to UNIDA easier, as they can communicate effectively in Arabic. One student noted, "*Muamalah* with the people of UNIDA with friends and asatidz, all are accustomed to Arabic. Luckily, this became easy for me, and I entered the Faculty of Arabic Language Education."

Arabic is one of the oldest languages and is morphologically rich. Code-switching—using multiple languages in the same context—has become common in Arab countries, where Arabic is often blended with English. Students familiar with Arabic find that they can engage with their environment more easily, leading to a desire to learn Indonesian as well. One Sudanese student expressed that he felt 40% familiar with Indonesian vocabulary, while others from Turkey and Thailand showed a preference for Arabic during interviews, although some Thai students communicated more in English.

The importance of the host country's language is critical for cultural competence in intercultural communication. Research indicates that cultural and linguistic values significantly influence international students' experiences. The three-zone communication theory categorizes expatriates based on their language proficiency, which is applicable to international students navigating the host language environment at UNIDA. For instance, Turkish students might find themselves in Zone One, learning basic Indonesian skills. Their experiences during orientation weeks, filled with cultural performances, serve as exciting introductions to Indonesian culture, even if they struggle with the meanings of chants or songs. One Turkish student, despite not understanding the lyrics, participated in

singing as part of their cultural integration process.

Furthermore, the relationship between language and cultural identity is essential. While Sudanese students find comfort in Arabic, they also recognize the need to learn Indonesian for better integration. This dual experience reflects the continuous interplay of maintaining cultural roots through Arabic while adapting to the local culture through Indonesian. Language at UNIDA illustrates the power relations within the academic environment. The prestige associated with Arabic and English raises questions about inclusivity and the role of Indonesian in cultural exchange. This complexity is particularly pronounced for students from non-Arabic-speaking countries like Turkey and Thailand, who must navigate the linguistic expectations of the institution while learning Indonesian.

The language situation at UNIDA reflects a complex interplay of cultural identity, adaptation, and power dynamics. It serves as a pathway to academic success and a means for international students to navigate their positions within the university's broader cultural and social milieu. Through the lens of language, we can better understand the experiences of these students as they engage in their cross-cultural journeys, striving to balance their cultural heritage with the demands of their new environment.

Communicative Actions in Cross-Cultural Communication

Everyone will feel uncertainty at the beginning of communication, both familiar and unfamiliar, and everyone who experiences uncertainty will try to reduce their uncertainty. Uncertainty reduction will occur when individuals have the motivation to reduce uncertainty based on three parameters – deviation, anticipated interaction, and source control (Aunul et al., 2022) The beginning of interaction determines the continuity of subsequent communication, and the interest of communication participants shows a similarity in non-verbal behavior that creates openness. First, individuals are explicitly asked to seek explanations in case of deviations in the form of violations of

expectations. Second, they seek to reduce uncertainty by anticipating interacting with others in the future. Third, they want to find out if others have any influence over the distribution of rewards and fees.

The findings of the communication actions of international students from Sudan are unique. From the experience of living in Indonesia, he conveyed that he liked many things with different communities with several tribes. His Qur'an memorization competence led to the experience of meeting in several places and having been to Lampung to become a tarawih Imam there and in Ponorogo. For him, he saw Indonesian people with various cultures all the same, namely Indonesia.

In the context of cross-cultural communication, a number of key experiential subjects emerge from the experiences of international students, particularly those from Sudan. A noteworthy aspect of their experience is the distinctive relationship they develop with faculty members on campus. The profound sense of *tawadhu* (humility) is evident in the manner in which they interact with academic staff, participate in forums, pray together in mosques, and even enjoy the accessibility of high-ranking officials like rectors, who can easily be invited into their homes. This stands in contrast to their experiences in Sudan, where such openness is not as prevalent.

Furthermore, age-related differences have been identified as a significant factor influencing their cross-cultural experiences. Sudanese students, who are frequently older than their counterparts, do not experience feelings of inferiority due to this age discrepancy. They espouse the view that the acquisition of knowledge is not constrained by age and adhere to the principle of maintaining humility and receptivity to learning from individuals of all ages.

This passage provides a compelling illustration of the adaptability and resilience of Sudanese and Chadian students as they navigate cross-cultural differences in Indonesia. Their awareness of communication disparities, both verbal and nonverbal, is a significant factor that facilitates their ability to transition

effectively into new environments. These students demonstrate a readiness to adapt to new cultural contexts, a trait less evident in students from Turkey and Thailand, who appear less prepared for the cultural shifts. A comparison of these groups reveals the existence of disparate strategies and attitudes towards adaptation.

Sudanese and Chadian students got the value of adaptability and not being complicated by all circumstances because they were used to a difficult life, so they was not surprised by the differences. Experience finds difficult things, so get used to complicated things. Sudanese student used to work as a builder, bakery, worked in stables. Meanwhile, friends from Turkey are not used to different circumstances from their atmosphere. Furthermore, students from Sudan and Chad now feel that Indonesia is like home. He was even dreaming of being able to marry a woman from Indonesia.

The experience of communication acts in a cultural context in Turkish students is one of the differences found in terms of mosques. In Turkey, every mosque uses a prayer mat, while in Indonesia, many mosques do not have a prayer mat. The comparison also extends to how different student groups experience Indonesian social settings. Turkish students, for example, are surprised by Indonesia's relaxed approach to male-female interactions, compared to the stricter customs they are used to back home. Additionally, Indonesia's diverse regional cultures further enrich the international students' experience, offering them insights into the unique characteristics of different Indonesian communities. Turkish students learn to appreciate these subtleties, whether it's in dress codes or daily habits, even though they initially find them baffling.

The Turkish student also explained his experience with toilets. There are no slippers in the toilet, even though he should wear slippers in his habit, which is strange. Even if you wear slippers, you will be scolded, whereas in Turkey, people find slippers in every toilet, and slippers are explicitly reserved for toilets. This strange thing can finally be understood by students with their experience coming to several

regions in Indonesia. Besides Ponorogo, he has visited Jakarta, Bogor, Cianjur, Lampung, Jogja, Banjarnegara.

From the experience of living on campus and in various regions, this international student also felt strange with how his friends dressed. When praying, many Indonesians generally entered the mosque wearing clothes like women (sarongs). How to use it is different for students from Malaysia. Nevertheless, there is no difference in the clothes used because generally, in the campus world do not wear shirts but T-shirts and jeans. There are differences in dress codes in UNIDA, and there is no finding of what campuses are with dressing in Turkey. When entering class, the dress code of UNIDA students is quite strict; they must wear shirts and pants of materials (no jeans, corduroys, the like) and panthopel shoes.

As mentioned in the previous discussion, the foreign consulate community is implemented with the habit of conducting groups in activities such as competitions or sports competitions. There are no competitions specifically for foreign countries, but representatives of dormitories because of the awareness of understanding that all are brothers. Awareness means that every Indonesian has a distinctive culture; Like Sumatrans and Sulawesians have strong voices, while from Java, the majority are soft. This is different from them; they like to talk with much conversation, and there is no differentiation even if they are not from them, and this is a fantastic experience. Turkish students are also quite surprised by the habit of Indonesians (stereotypically) being very slow; for them, something that is usual in Turkey is enough in five minutes, hyperbole can be done up to two days, and this is every job, not just on campus, but everyone (interview one of the Turkish students, 29, May, 2023).

While evaluation is not the goal of this study, it can be said that the most prominent contradiction for the achievement of goals our interview findings show that after the last meeting hosted by the university, the mentors and mentees did not separate and seemed to maintain communication. Observational

data also showed that many mentors and mentees sat with their peers from their home countries and even mingled with new friends during that last meeting. This is a reversal from the findings (Wong et al., 2022) in her research on the relationships of foreign female students in Malaysia and Korea, who found poor communication, whether due to inadequate shared language, shyness, inadequate commitment, or group fit and failure to establish weekly face-to-face meetings, mainly due to scheduling clashes, costs, and communication difficulties related to group size.

Some sociologists believe there is a reciprocal relationship between communication and culture. Culture is part of communication here and has a role in determining, developing, maintaining, and passing on culture (Putri et al., 2021) It is technically explained in cross-cultural communication that communication is essential to build self-concept and self-actualization, obtaining happiness, and distancing oneself from pressure and tension. Sudanese and Chadian students demonstrably exhibit a robust capacity to adapt to novel environments through a combination of cultural humility and resilience. Turkish students, while initially experiencing difficulty in understanding Indonesian customs, eventually learn to navigate these differences through personal experience. This comparison between the groups highlights the importance of communication and adaptability in overcoming the challenges of cross-cultural integration. It also illustrates the broader role that culture plays in shaping one's ability to thrive in a new environment.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have significant implications for universities seeking to provide support for international students. First, the heightened significance of identity through social comparison indicates that universities should implement strategies to facilitate positive engagement between international students and both their own cultural group and the broader student body. By fostering environments that

encourage cross-cultural interaction and shared experiences, universities can assist international students in navigating the complexities of identity formation in a foreign context. Furthermore, although Arabic and English are the principal languages applied to academic and social activities at UNIDA, the awareness and willingness of students to speak Indonesian demonstrate the significance of providing language assistance services, even if not formally required. This could serve to enhance students' sense of belonging and facilitate their adjustment to life in Indonesia.

It would be beneficial for future research to investigate the long-term effects of communication practices on the mental well-being of international students. This study has demonstrated that communication is of great consequence with regard to self-concept, self-actualization, and emotional well-being. Consequently, further investigation may prove fruitful in elucidating the

relationship between communication styles and coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety. Furthermore, investigating the impact of language learning on social integration in diverse university settings, where the acquisition of the local language may or may not be a priority, could provide insights into the optimization of support systems for international students across a range of academic environments.

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