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The Dynamics of Intercultural Communication between Migrant Students and the Local Community in the City of Padang

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of intercultural communication between migrant students and the local community in Padang, West Sumatra. The growing presence of students from various regions has led to increasingly complex cultural interactions. Employing a qualitative method with a case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving both migrant students and local community members. The findings reveal that intercultural interactions are dynamic but marked by several key challenges, including language barriers, social stereotypes, and differences in cultural values. These challenges can hinder the process of adaptation and social integration for students in their new environment. Nevertheless, adaptation occurs through various strategies such as learning the local language, participating in community activities, and building interpersonal relationships through informal approaches. This study emphasizes the importance of intercultural communication competence as a crucial factor in fostering harmonious social integration within multicultural settings. The ability to understand cultural differences and engage in empathetic communication plays a vital role in minimizing misunderstandings and creating inclusive spaces for interaction. These insights are relevant not only for educational and social policy development but also contribute to the broader discourse on intercultural communication within the diverse sociocultural context of Indonesia.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, migrant students, Minangkabau, cultural adaptation,

INTRODUCTION

In the context of an increasingly pluralistic social life, intercultural interaction becomes inevitable, especially in cities that serve as centers of higher education, such as the city of Padang. This city is inhabited not only by the indigenous Minangkabau people but also by thousands of students from various regions of Indonesia who come to pursue their education. This phenomenon creates complex dynamics of intercultural communication between migrant students and the local community, each bringing different systems of values, norms, and cultural habits. To understand this communication process, various perspectives from experts in communication and cultural anthropology can serve as theoretical foundations. According to Gudykunst and Kim (2003), intercultural communication is a process in which individuals from different cultures send and

receive messages influenced by their cultural differences. These differences may include communication styles, values, language, and worldviews. In the interactions between migrant students and the Minangkabau community in Padang, several challenges arise, such as differing interpretations of meaning, misunderstandings, and communication barriers that can lead to conflict or social distance.

Gudykunst also developed the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory, which explains that in intercultural communication situations, individuals experience uncertainty and anxiety due to a lack of knowledge about other cultures. Migrant students, especially those interacting with the Minangkabau local culture for the first time, undergo a period of social adaptation. Their success in communication is determined by their ability to manage anxiety and understand the prevailing social norms (Gudykunst, 2005). Furthermore, Milton J. Bennett (1998) introduced the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which describes the stages of intercultural sensitivity development. These stages begin with denial of cultural differences, followed by defense, and eventually progress to acceptance and adaptation. Migrant students who interact with the local community go through these phases as part of their adaptation process and the development of intercultural communication competence. The higher their sensitivity, the greater the likelihood of establishing effective and harmonious communication.

Meanwhile, Hofstede (1980) contributed the theory of cultural dimensions, which is also relevant in examining these dynamics. One of the most prominent dimensions is individualism versus collectivism. The Minangkabau community is known for upholding strong collectivist values and deeply rooted customs. For students coming from more individualistic cultures, adapting to the Minangkabau social system can pose a particular challenge, especially in decision-making, communication etiquette, and interpersonal relationships that are strongly tied to familial values.

Thus, the dynamics of intercultural communication between migrant students and the local community in the city of Padang is a process that involves not only the exchange of information, but also the negotiation of identity, value adaptation, and the formation of mutual understanding. The success of this interaction is largely determined by the willingness of both parties to learn from each other, accept differences, and establish open and respectful communication. The theoretical foundations laid by scholars such as Gudykunst, Bennett, Hofstede, and Koentjaraningrat provide a solid framework for analyzing this phenomenon from a communication and cultural perspective.

Interregional student mobility is a growing social phenomenon, particularly in educational cities like Padang. This city serves as a center of higher education in West Sumatra and attracts students from various provinces. The encounter between students and the local Minangkabau community gives rise to unique intercultural interactions. Minangkabau culture is known for its matrilineal system, egalitarian values, and the principle of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*, which shapes the community's social identity. Differences in values, language, and habits between migrant students and the local community create communication challenges that need to be further explored. This study aims to understand how intercultural communication occurs and how barriers and adaptation strategies are undertaken by both parties.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a method aimed at deeply understanding social or human phenomena through a descriptive type of inquiry. The research locations were purposively selected in three areas of Padang City with a high concentration of migrant students, namely Pauh, Ulak Karang, and Lubuk Buaya, as well as Lubuk Begalung. The data collection techniques include:

1. In-depth Interviews
   In-depth interview is a data collection technique in qualitative research conducted through direct conversations between the researcher and informants, aimed at exploring information in a deep, broad, and detailed manner regarding a person's experiences, perspectives, attitudes, or feelings toward a particular phenomenon. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 migrant students and 10 local residents. The data sought included: students' perceptions of their communication with the local community, the obstacles they faced, and the adaptation strategies they employed. From the local residents, the data focused on their views toward migrant students and the forms of interaction that occurred. Interview locations included rented houses, student boarding houses (kos), nearby stalls or shops, and residents' homes.
2. Participant Observation
   Participant observation (sometimes also referred to as participatory observational observation) is a data collection method in qualitative research in which the researcher directly observes behaviors, interactions, and social situations by participating or being directly involved in the lives or activities of the people being studied. Participant observation was conducted to directly observe patterns of social interaction. The aspects observed included: verbal and non-verbal communication between students and residents, student involvement in social activities, and community responses. Observation period: conducted from March to April 2024, particularly during community activities such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), *tarawih* prayers, and communal iftar (*buka puasa bersama*).
3. Documentation was obtained from neighborhood WhatsApp group chats (RT groups), residents' social media, as well as photos of social activities involving students and the local community. Concrete data collected:
   - Narratives of students' experiences in social interaction.
   - Records of social activities participated in by students.
   - Community responses to the presence of students.
   - Forms of communication barriers and their solutions.

4. Social definition
   Social interaction in this context refers to the reciprocal relationship between migrant students and the local community, which occurs through daily activities such as shopping, participating in community events, or casual conversations in the neighborhood. The

interactions can be formal (e.g., invitations to neighborhood meetings) or informal (chatting at local food stalls).

5. Interaction Patterns
   Interaction is formed through:
   - Casual conversations at coffee stalls.
   - Religious activities at the mosque.
   - Participation in mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and major celebrations.
   - Economic activities such as shopping at neighborhood stalls.

Students who actively socialize tend to be more accepted, while those who are passive are often labeled as “aloof” or “difficult to get along with.”

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Intercultural Communication and Conflict Resolution Among Migrant Students in Padang City

The presence of students from outside West Sumatra, particularly from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, has created dynamic intercultural interactions within Padang City. These students, who pursue education in various public and private universities, not only bring diverse academic interests but also carry with them distinct social norms, communication styles, and cultural values. While many students successfully adapt to their new environment, others face challenges, particularly in navigating everyday social interactions with the local Minangkabau community. Students who actively engage in social interactions are generally more accepted and integrated into the local community. In contrast, those who remain passive or withdrawn are often labeled as "indifferent" or "difficult to socialize with." These perceptions can lead to the formation of social boundaries that hinder mutual understanding and community cohesion.

Communication Barriers

One of the most prominent challenges in intercultural communication is language. In Padang, many residents primarily use the Minang language in informal settings. This poses a significant barrier for new students who are unfamiliar with the local dialect. As a result, they often struggle to participate in conversations or interpret social cues appropriately. Another issue is the different cultural norms related to politeness. Many migrant students express fear of being perceived as rude or disrespectful due to their lack of understanding of local customs. For example, there are specific expectations on how to greet elders or address community leaders, which may differ significantly from the students' own cultural backgrounds. Moreover, students are sometimes stereotyped by the local community. Labels such as "anak kos pendiam" (reserved boarding house kids) or assumptions that students are indifferent to their surroundings create an environment of mistrust. These stereotypes hinder open communication and make it difficult for students to feel welcomed.

Student Experiences

Despite these challenges, many students gradually develop strategies to adapt and build positive relationships with the local community. One student noted:

> "At first, I was afraid of being asked to do things at the mosque because I didn't understand. But it turns out the locals are patient in teaching, as long as we're willing to join in first."

Such experiences reflect that local residents are often receptive and supportive when students show initiative and a willingness to engage.

Adaptation Strategies

To navigate cultural differences and foster better integration, students adopt several adaptation strategies:

1. Learning the Minang language informally through interactions with local friends and boarding house owners.
2. Participating in community activities**,** such as gotong royong (community clean-ups), buka puasa bersama (breaking fast together during Ramadan), and pengajian (religious study groups).
3. Taking the initiative to greet local residents**,** which is a valued practice in Minangkabau culture.
4. Using friends as intermediaries during communication when they lack confidence.
5. Adapting to local norms**,** including dressing modestly and maintaining cleanliness around the boarding house.

These strategies help bridge cultural gaps and demonstrate students' respect for local customs, which fosters mutual trust and acceptance.

Conflict and Resolution

Conflict, defined as a struggle arising from incompatible goals, values, or interests, is a natural part of social interaction. According to Lewis A. Coser, conflict involves efforts to neutralize or eliminate opposition, while Soerjono Soekanto views it as a process where individuals or groups attempt to achieve goals by opposing others. Conflicts can manifest in various forms:

- Interpersonal conflict: Between individuals due to differing perspectives.
- Intergroup conflict**:** Between groups with opposing interests.
- Social conflict**:** Stemming from unequal structures (e.g., class differences).
- Political conflict**:** Over power and authority.
- Economic conflict**:** Arising from competition over resources.
- Cultural conflict**:** Caused by differing beliefs, values, or customs.

In the context of Padang, several conflicts involving students and the local community have been identified:

- Minor misunderstandings, such as students not greeting neighbors, perceived as impolite.
- Noise complaints, especially due to students' nighttime activities.
- Lifestyle mismatches**,** like bringing friends of the opposite sex to boarding houses without permission.

Conflict Resolution Approaches

1. Direct Dialogue**:** Open conversations between students and residents, often facilitated by boarding house owners or neighborhood heads (RT), are essential in resolving misunderstandings.
2. Informal Mediation**:** Community leaders or respected elders often act as mediators to de-escalate tension and guide both parties toward mutual understanding.
3. Behavioral Adjustment**:** Students usually adjust their behavior after receiving advice or gentle warnings from community members.

In addition to these local mechanisms, broader strategies in conflict resolution include:

- Negotiation**:** Direct communication between conflicting parties to find a mutual agreement.
- Mediation**:** Involvement of a neutral third party to facilitate dialogue.
- Arbitration**:** A third party makes a binding decision, used in formal conflict settings.
- Compromise**:** Each party concedes part of their demand to find a middle ground.
- Collaboration**:** Both parties work together to achieve a win-win solution.
- Coercion**:** Use of power to impose a solution, though less effective for long-term harmony.

Understanding these approaches enables students and communities to respond to cultural differences constructively, promoting social cohesion and tolerance.

Higher Education Landscape in Padang

As of 2024, Padang is home to numerous public and private higher education institutions, accommodating a significant number of students from across Indonesia:

University / Institution	Number of Students
Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP)	40,062
Universitas Andalas (UNAND)	32,326
Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Imam Bonjol	25,000
Universitas Bung Hatta	2,000
Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat	5,440

Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat	6,691
Universitas Putra Indonesia (UPI YPTK)	11,000
Universitas Dharma Andalas	-
Institut Teknologi Padang	2,000
Other Private Institutions	63,333
Total	**175,675**

Tabel 1. Number of students in Padang City

These figures underscore the scale of cultural diversity in Padang's student population. The interaction between these students and the local community inevitably shapes the city's social landscape.

The increasing presence of migrant students in Padang presents both opportunities and challenges for intercultural understanding. While language and cultural differences initially create barriers, many students are able to overcome them through active adaptation and engagement with local communities. Conflict is an inevitable part of social interaction, yet with effective resolution strategies such as dialogue, mediation, and collaboration these conflicts can become opportunities for learning and growth.

The experiences of students and the community demonstrate that intercultural communication competence is not merely about language proficiency but also involves empathy, cultural sensitivity, and proactive engagement. This study suggests that universities, local leaders, and communities should collaborate more closely to facilitate student integration, reduce cultural misunderstandings, and build a more inclusive social environment. Ultimately, strengthening intercultural communication skills among students contributes to their personal development and to broader social harmony in multicultural urban settings like Padang.

CONCLUSION

Intercultural communication between migrant students and the Minangkabau community in Padang City illustrates a multifaceted social process shaped by linguistic, cultural, and relational factors. While cultural differences naturally pose challenges, they also offer opportunities for meaningful engagement and mutual learning. The daily interactions between students and residents—ranging from casual greetings to participation in community activities—serve as important arenas for cultural negotiation and the formation of social bonds. These interactions are not static but evolve in response to both parties' willingness to adapt, understand, and respect each other. The success of intercultural communication depends significantly on the degree of adaptability shown by the students and the openness of the local community. Migrant students who demonstrate initiative—such as learning the local language, adhering to community norms, and

involving themselves in social events—often experience smoother integration and greater social acceptance. At the same time, the Minangkabau community's patience, hospitality, and informal mentorship play a vital role in creating a supportive environment where students can gradually find their place.

However, harmonious intercultural relationships do not occur automatically. Misunderstandings, stereotypes, and unspoken social expectations can quickly escalate into conflict if not addressed constructively. Therefore, there is an urgent need to equip students with intercultural communication competence—skills that go beyond academic knowledge to include empathy, contextual awareness, and interpersonal sensitivity. These competencies allow students to navigate unfamiliar social terrains with confidence and humility. Equally important is the role of the local community in fostering inclusive spaces that welcome diversity. Local leaders, educational institutions, and community organizations can work collaboratively to build platforms for cultural exchange and shared dialogue. Structured orientation programs, cultural workshops, and regular community-student forums may help bridge existing gaps and cultivate a more cohesive urban society. So, intercultural communication in Padang is a dynamic interplay of adaptation, empathy, and mutual effort. When approached with openness and respect, it becomes a powerful tool for strengthening social cohesion and enriching the cultural fabric of the city. As Padang continues to host a growing and diverse student population, promoting intercultural competence and inclusive community practices will be essential for nurturing not only academic success but also long-term social harmony.

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